

**A CRITICAL SURVEY OF ARDMORE CERAMICS:**

**1985-1996**

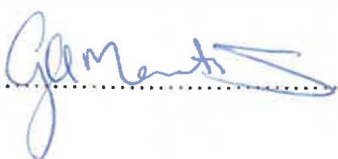
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters  
of Arts in Fine Arts in the Department of Fine Arts and History of Art,  
University of Natal

Pietermaritzburg  
1997

## DECLARATION

I declare that, unless otherwise stated, this thesis is comprised of my own original work.

  
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## PREFACE

The research involves a critical review of the ceramic art produced at the Ardmore Studio from its inception in 1985 to 1996.

This dissertation was supervised by Juliette Leeb-du Toit at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

The following procedure has been adopted:

1. Reference notes, entitled Endnotes, appear at the end of each chapter. Endnotes have been used to denote information collected through personal interviews or to serve as additional commentary to amplify points raised in the text. They commence with the number 1 at the beginning of each chapter.
2. A Bibliography has been compiled and includes all articles cited in the text as well as relevant reading matter. Published and unpublished sources have been separated and the lists appear in alphabetical order according to the author's family name. The list appears on pages 95-102.
3. Illustrations are indicated in each chapter by numbers which appear in bold after the title of each example. The list of illustrations and the illustrations have been inserted at the end of the dissertation from page 102.
4. An Appendix has been included with biographical details of the artists, an interview conducted with Halsted-Berning, expenditure of the studio and recent information written about the by a friend of Halsted-Berning's.

5. Non-English words have been italicised.
6. Titles of all art works and books have been printed in bold italics.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank the Fine Art Department and the University of Natal for the finances and facilities which made the present study possible. I would also like to express my appreciation to the Centre for Science Development, for financial backing, without whom this study would not have been possible.

I am indebted to my supervisors, especially Juliette Leeb du Toit, who set me on the path of this study, and offered unending guidance, encouragement and academic inspiration. Many thanks also to Juliet Armstrong whose ever-watchful eye directed me through my practical work.

I am especially grateful to Fée Halsted-Berning who has given of her time, her knowledge and her friendship. I have learnt much from her about making art in the 'real' world.

This study would not have been possible if it were not for Bonnie Ntshalintshali, Josephine Ghesa and the artists from the studio. I wish to thank all the members of the studio for their time and patience.

I thank translators, Sister Magda from Mariannahill Convent, Phineus Mveli and Moses Nqubuka from the Ardmore Studio who also offered their keen insights into the dynamics of the studio.

For the loan of visual and written material, I thank Valerie Leigh at Museum Services, Yvonne Winters at the Campbell Collections, the Durban Art Gallery and the Tatham Art Gallery.

To Mrs Fowles, Fine Art and History of Art Department secretary, thanks for her help and advice.

A special thanks to Jenny Aitchison, subject librarian at the University of Natal, for obliging me in every way possible.

To Alister Nixion from Audio Visual at the University of Natal for helping me scan and print the illustrations for my dissertation, I express my appreciation.

I owe a very special thanks to my colleagues and friends especially to Ian Garrett, Michelle Rall, Lawrence Asare, Cara Walters and Simon Pitcher for their constant support, criticism and encouragement.

Last but not least, to my parents, for firstly encouraging me to study further, and for being a constant inspiration to me. I thank my father for reading my thesis, for his willing assistance with technical problems and for offering critical, enlightening and often humorous perspectives on my research. To my mother I express heartfelt appreciation for her moral support and encouragement especially over the last few months.

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to trace the development of the ceramics produced at the Ardmore Studio, in the Champagne Valley, KwaZulu-Natal from its inception in 1985 to 1996. In tracing the expansion of the studio various issues became apparent which can be seen as relevant to the study of contemporary black art in South Africa. The Introduction puts Ardmore ceramics in the context of current trends in black art by presenting an historical overview of art centres in KwaZulu-Natal. The perceptions of the artist, the audience, and the role of the cultural broker are considered. Thus the circumstances which led to emergence of contemporary black art in its present form and the development of contemporary ceramics in South Africa are also examined.

In Chapter One an historical outline of the origins of the studio is introduced. Fée Halsted-Berning's involvement in the studio and her relationship with the artists, as well as her perceptions of art as related to her personal preferences, her training and current South African trends in ceramics are discussed. The forging of an Ardmore identity, the growth and expansion of the studio, the interrelation that exists between the artists and the audience are also considered.

Chapters Two and Three deal with two specific artists, Bonnie Ntshalintshali and Josephine Ghesa. Issues related to the sources and origins of their imagery are examined in terms of their respective social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Ardmore Studio situated in the Champagne Valley in KwaZulu-Natal, which began in 1985, can be described as a community-based, informal art enterprise where members of the local Loskop/Winterton population have acquired certain artistic skills. These skills are applied in the manufacture of highly decorated domestic ware and sculptural ceramics. The studio was established by artist Fée Halsted-Berning whose vision and aesthetic predilections have shaped the nature and content of the work.

Halsted-Berning's role has changed from an initiator and facilitator to that of a director at the studio. She also plays an important role in maintaining a high standard of work, providing materials, promoting the work and initiating new projects, ideas, imagery and forms. She often works in collaboration with the artists on projects and individual pieces, often vicariously imparting her ideas to the artists.

In January 1996 Halsted-Berning relocated with her family to Springvale Farm, Rossetta, KwaZulu-Natal, about one hours drive from Ardmore. The move necessitated a restructuring in the management of the studio, prompting the artists<sup>1</sup> to work less dependently on Halsted-Berning. The changes and restructuring resulting from the move are discussed in Chapter One.

There are currently over 40 black women and a few black men working at the studio. Ardmore is recognised both nationally and internationally with works represented in numerous local and international private and public collections. Besides success being indicated by extensive representation in collections, individual Ardmore artists have been formally acknowledged as recipients of a number of awards. These include the Standard Bank Young Artist Award to Bonnie Ntshalintshali and Fee Halsted-Berning in 1989, and numerous APSA awards to individuals (listed in *Curricula Vitae* in Appendix 2). In 1993 Bonnie Ntshalintshali was invited

as one of eight artists from South Africa to exhibit at the Aperto Venice Biennale (Martin 1993).

Part of the discussion in this dissertation concerns the infrastructure and organisation of the studio. However, as the Ardmore Studio, currently operational, exists by responding spontaneously to the demands imposed through circumstances, it is difficult to make generalisations about the studio, the work produced at the studio and the way it operates. The Ardmore Style, numbers and members of the studio, medium - clay source, under-glaze range glaze, firing temperature - the rate and method of payment, which appear finite, are actually incessantly changing. While recording and updating information is as accurate as possible, the information collected may only hold true at the given time.

Ardmore Ceramics needs to be considered in two contexts: in the context of contemporary Black art and in the context of contemporary South African ceramics. Much contemporary Black art<sup>2</sup> in South Africa was rooted in pre-existing art forms that stemmed from particular cultural identities. The changes that took place in traditional art<sup>3</sup>, as a result of the incursion and imposition of new and foreign stimuli, date back to the arrival of European settlers (De Jager 1988: 202-203).

The arrival of European settlers in KwaZulu-Natal created a catalyst with incentives for production as well as a new form of patronage. The Europeans traded with the indigens for many commodities, including items from their material culture, to keep as souvenirs or curiosities or send back to the mother country as trophies of their exploratory adventures. This precipitated viable opportunities for entrepreneurial craftsmen and artists who adapted their art to suit market requirements (De Jager 1992:2).

Art production from the 1870s seems to have been further facilitated by urbanisation, westernization and the introduction of Christianity to traditional societies. The transformations in art that occurred can also be attributed to changes in material conditions, new forms of patronage and the introduction of new educational values (Sack 1988:7). Monetary rewards

gave artists independence from former social systems that bound them to making traditional or ritual art, and brought about increasing individualism that has become an integral part of contemporary Black art (de Jager 1992:3).

In addition, the objects made by skilled craftsmen, lost their original symbolic and ritual function catering rather for western aesthetic appeal (Sack 1988:7). Nettleton comments that:

"these putatively functional objects were in reality one of the earliest forms of transitional art in that they start to bridge the gap between traditional and western market demands" (Nettleton 1989:55).

This apparent new art-form therefore brought about its defining and labelling as 'transitional art'.<sup>4</sup> This phenomenon became particularly apparent in Black art in the 1970s and 1980s when such art entered the urban gallery context and was implicitly viewed as part of mainstream art (Richards 1991:36-37).

In KwaZulu-Natal<sup>5</sup> the development of cross-culturally informed art was initially stimulated largely by art enterprises and centres run *inter alia* by missionaries who encouraged and stimulated the work of black artists. Although missionaries aimed primarily at converting indigens to a Christian-based faith, they used art as the medium through which to educate, empower and proselytise (Leeb-du Toit 1993:6-20).

Two such centres in KwaZulu-Natal recognised as being largely responsible for implementing this kind of training are Mariannhill and the Rorke's Drift Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) Art and Craft Centre. While these centres provided an informal art education, the training obtained from these centres was never recognised in any official capacity (Younge 1990:4).

In addition Jack Grossert<sup>6</sup>, is recognised as having played a significant supportive role either in the founding or sustaining of these institutions. Grossert's approach to teaching art sought expression through the acknowledgement of an African identity and heritage, expressed either



thematically or stylistically. This was to be similarly approached by Sister Pientia<sup>7</sup> and Sister Johanna<sup>8</sup> from Mariannahill (Leeb-du Toit 1993:11) and the teachers from Rorke's Drift ELC. Swedish teacher, Peder Gowenius, from Rorke's Drift, indicates part of the motivation for this direction:

"How do we make oppressed people aware of their situation, of their own strength, creating an interest in their future and a commitment to the concepts of self reliance, freedom and independence?" (Jephson 1990:6).

The reply, according to Jephson, came from Guinea-Bissau revolutionary Amilcar Cabral:<sup>9</sup>

"the rural masses, subjected to political domination and economic exploitation, rediscover in their own culture (embodied in a way of life, in the means of material production and in their values and beliefs) the only force capable of preserving their identity" (Jephson 1990:6)

The Rorke's Drift ELC represents a unique and successful venture in cross-cultural and inter-racial co-operation (de Jager 1991:33), in that it afforded opportunities for visual commentary on social, political and spiritual experiences of black South Africans (Jephson 1990:7). It also provided a voice through which artists could express their 'Africanness'. Therefore such art centres played a significant role in preserving black South African identity, in gaining acceptance of black artists and in integrating them into the mainstream (de Jager 1991:30).

Further these early art centres, such as Rorke's Drift ELC, Ndaleni, and Mariannahill, possibly laid the ground for subsequent development of several smaller centres in KwaZulu-Natal. Thus the successful reception of Ardmore's art is based on many of the attitudes to Black art that were forged or have subsequently developed by white audiences in response to the work produced by artists in these centres.

Given the relationship between art and society<sup>10</sup>, in which art involuntarily and spontaneously underwent certain transformations, current Black art was therefore inevitably moulded by historical circumstances. The exposure of a foreign western culture to an indigenous African culture, and *vice versa*, inevitably resulted in a degree of cross-cultural exchange (De Jager 1992:1).<sup>11</sup>

While cultural exchange has been considered a selective process, where elements are absorbed or rejected, either consciously or subconsciously by the recipient (Herskovits 1958:7). This exchange thus ensures reciprocity, with both parties recipients of new ideas.

Further, Vogel (1991:30) indicates that although the assimilative process is a selective and meaningful one, with interpretations often based on pre-existing African material culture, it is the combining of these two forces that facilitates the perpetuity of African culture.

The above envisages ideal processes in the merging of two cultures, but does not take into account the domination of one culture by another. In South Africa the equal reciprocity in cultural exchange has been largely absent since colonisation. Domination by the ruling white newcomers, who upheld a developing segregationist policy, was forcibly imposed on the indigenous inhabitants.

The reciprocal interchange which occurs at Ardmore between Halsted-Berning and Ntshalintshali, and also between Halsted-Berning and the other Ardmore artists, reveals a complex cross-cultural dimension. Halsted-Berning constantly exposes Ardmore artists to visual material derived from her western cultural context (such as floral motifs, media imagery) as well as imagery that she perceives of as indigenous, such as African fauna and flora. Thus clearly definable African animals and floral motifs are assimilated and juxtaposed into a fictional iconography. Her intention is therefore to create a seemingly authentic idiom - partly naive and partly ethnic - based on her western perception of what these constitute. The artists then interpret the imagery in terms of their artistic capacities, cultural conceptions and tastes which

are manifested in the eclectic and ethnic idiom that has become typically associated with Ardmore production.<sup>12</sup>

Thus the Ardmore artist initially has limited choice in terms of theme or medium. The selection and combination of motifs, however, is an expression of the artists' individuality. This will be addressed in Chapters One, Two and Three. Cross-cultural reciprocity mainly exists in terms of the nature of the artists' interpretation and the approbation given by Halsted-Berning.

The nature and extent of cultural exchange at Ardmore is identified particularly in the discussions of Bonnie Ntshalintshali's sculptures (Chapter Two) and Wonderboy Nxumalo's work (Chapter One). These artists, in selecting images of western origin (such as biblical themes or comic-strip heroes), usually interpret and modify these in terms of their own personalised vision and experience, which westerners tend to perceive as ethnic. It should be acknowledged that these are not the only sources, and as will be pointed out later, these sources may have significant to the artist prior to coming to Ardmore.

In extracting essential features of the studio it seems necessary to consider and define two key concepts of ethnicity and multiculturalism. These concepts are central to the discussions of the Ardmore Studio especially the art of Bonnie Ntshalintshali and Josephine Ghesa.

The concept of ethnicity has, for some years been the topic of considerable debate and therefore it could become problematic to fix ethnicity to a single definition. Ethnicity can potentially be seen as problematic if viewed in isolation as static and constant. Klopper suggests that ethnicity is seen in South Africa as an invention of apartheid, shaped by government officials and missionaries as well as the convergence of patriarchal interests (Klopper 1992:11). The term 'ethnic identity' will be used as a preferred term in this dissertation.

Graburn (1976:28) in using the term ethnicity, suggests that it undergoes a constant re-definition. In the art market, there is a cyclic or double reflective dynamic that exists between the artist and the consumer in terms of the consumer's perceptions of the artist's ethnic identity, the maker often forging an ethnic-based identity to satisfy perceived market requirements.

Ethnicity, difficult to define in art, is recognised in the West as a selection of overt features derived from an original culture (Graburn 1976:19). Hence stereotypes of a given culture are often used in conveying, in art or elsewhere, the essential features of a given culture. However in practice, many cultures have undergone significant transformations, the result of colonisation and other interactions, which have inevitably dissipated the perceived 'authenticity' of such cultures, and contribute to the difficulty outlined above. Vogel (1991:30) therefore notes that westerners need to accept that elements of western material culture have been incorporated into another.

Therefore it becomes significant to note how the artist expresses an ethnic identity especially when viewed in the context of Black art produced largely for a western market. Graburn (1976:27-30) further indicates the significance of 'borrowed identity'<sup>13</sup> which becomes as much part of the present ethnicity as the original or so-called indigenous identity. Artists therefore both absorb new symbols, and utilise stereotypes or reproduce typical elements extracted from past prototypes in their work in order to satisfy current market perceptions and demands.

Thus 'success', in all its ramifications, hinges on the Ardmore artists' ability to realise what constitutes a typical ethnic character (by a potential market) in focusing on selective stereotypical features. Art implicitly reflects the tastes, interests and demands of the consumer as perceived by the artist or art entrepreneur.

For example, at Ardmore the ethnic identity, although borrowed from diverse sources and consciously forged to appeal to a specific audience, becomes as much part of a perceived 'Zulu'<sup>14</sup> identity peculiar to the artists as the presumed authentic identity.

'Cultural purity', derived from the Hegelian idea that each culture has its own nature and essence is seen as the antithesis of multiculturalism (Vogel 1991: 275). The latter is seen as the forth and last stage of identity after wake of colonialism, imperialism and modernism. It can be described as a post-modern feature which strives for global unity attained without destroying the individualities of the various cultures within (Vogel 1993:11). Referring to Vogel's notion on multiculturalism, she suggests that contemporary black artists

'in their sense of identity, formed by whatever blends of African and European influences, they want to get beyond the questions of identity and difference and to move into the future' (Vogel 1993:11).

While a large proportion of the Ardmore market is tourist, the studio is distinctly different from the categories Jules-Rosette identifies in her definition of tourist art.<sup>15</sup> She describes five assumptions about tourist art:

"(1) tourist art objects are mass-produced; (2) many tourist art objects are made by inexperienced craftspeople; (3) several craftspeople, as opposed to a lone artist, create a single piece; (4) the consumers' demand is more important than the producer's creativity in the production of tourist art; and (5) the resultant artworks are inferior in quality or are artistically uninteresting" (Jules-Rosette 1984:16).

While the mode of production at the studio facilitates a division of labour where selected artists are involved in the manufacture of ware, while others are involved in the decoration and finish of the work, Jules-Rosette's other four assumptions do not hold true regarding the work made at Ardmore.

Ardmore work differs in that it was accepted by art critics when exhibited in a fine art context, which has implicitly freed it from likely associations with curio or tourist art. Further the Ardmore artists' perceptions contribute a central role in the distinctiveness that each piece exhibits. This uniqueness is also conveyed in the selection and translation of imagery, and in the

conveying of an individualised ethnic dimension which becomes increasingly idiosyncratic, as will be seen in Chapters Two and Three.

Although the artists do not have a formal art training, the training provided by Halsted-Berning is such that it has equipped them to produce highly skilled, innovative and individually handcrafted artwork.

The image-making process in tourist art as described by Jules-Rosette is influenced by a number of direct or indirect relationships between the artist and the consumer. These include "(1) a direct exchange of ideas between the artist and the audience, (2) intervention of the middleman in dictating styles, quality and quantity of production, (3) a commercial exchange that indirectly indicates the popularity and appeal of specific genres and styles, and (4) a perpetual ambiguity and information gap in the exchange" (Jules-Rosette 1984:235).

The ethnic character was introduced by Halsted-Berning as a result of her initial realisation that such content could capture the attention of a largely westernised audience which, in the early 1980s was becoming increasingly empathetic to indigenous or ethnic imagery in art.<sup>16</sup> This market showed a preference for zebra, giraffe and leopard motifs. It was also equally responsive to the stylistic and thematic translations of 'Africanised' Christian and western themes used in Bonnie Ntshalintshali's sculptures and the manner of translation of Josephine Ghesa's figurative sculptures, further influencing the Afro-ethnic<sup>17</sup> identity of the work.

While the current operations and dynamics of the studio appear comparable to models peculiar to African art centres observed by Graburn, Vogel and Jules-Rosette, intrinsic differences persist. The studio remains somewhat of a unique art enterprise since it was not based on any pre-existing model or traditional artform that prevailed in the area prior to Halsted-Berning's intervention. It developed spontaneously as a result of individual and collective circumstances prompted by Halsted-Berning and found a receptive audience enthralled by its indigeneity or Afro-ethnic character. Although the art itself was cultivated in response to artificial stimuli, it

will be shown in the following chapters that elements of the artists' own ethnic identity and culture constitute a major part of the artistic inspiration.

While it is important to consider the Ardmore Studio in the context of the history of local Black art, it seems equally significant to position the studio in the context of contemporary South African ceramics.

The Ardmore Studio, which began in 1985 can possibly be included as part of the apparent 1980s renaissance that broke with Anglo-Oriental traditions and resulted in the stylistic diversity that Cruise (1991:8-13) identifies as a positive feature of contemporary South African ceramics.

For most of this century, ceramics in South Africa was dominated by the Anglo-Oriental traditions, started by Bernard Leach<sup>18</sup>, English potter and founder of the craft pottery movement (Cruise 1991:10). Leach followed the thinking of members, like William Morris<sup>19</sup>, of the Arts and Craft Movement of the late nineteenth century, which advocated that good form in artifacts of daily living affected the quality of life. Leach took this Morrisian approach with him to Japan, which not only helped to fuel a revival of Japanese craft tradition but also cross-fertilised with English ceramic traditions. Leach's approach, empathetic with the Bauhaus 'less is more' concept, emphasised simplicity and truth to materials. The Anglo-Japanese ideal of 'a plain brown pot' was adopted. Ornament and decoration were considered superfluous (Cruise 1991:10).

While many early South African ceramists were influenced by the English traditions that were inherited with the imports of ceramic ware to South Africa, other potters working in South Africa such as Hilda Ditchburn<sup>20</sup>, Hyme Rabinowitz and Esias Bosch received their training in England by followers of Leach (Cruise 1991:10). Their work possibly formed the foundations on which ceramics, for the first part of this century in South Africa, was fashioned. Many of these people such as Hilda Ditchburn, who founded the Ceramic Division of the Fine Art Department at the University of Natal in the 1930s, became local ceramic teachers. Thus the

knowledge of ceramics acquired in England was passed on to their pupils, many of whom represent the contemporary generation of South African ceramists.

This is important to the Ardmore context since Halsted-Berning received some of her art training at the University of Natal under Juliet Armstrong<sup>21</sup>, who was at the time lecturer in Ceramics, and had been both a student and colleague of Ditchburn's.

Changes in the approach to ceramics in South Africa apparently began in the 1970s after the opening of the first APSA exhibition in 1976 at the Normand Dunn Gallery in Hilton, when Malcolm MacIntyre-Reid<sup>22</sup> criticised South African studio ceramics as suffering from the 'hairy-brown-stoneware' syndrome (Cruise 1991:12).

Further, in 1982 American ceramist David Middlebrook<sup>23</sup> came to South Africa as a visiting lecturer to the Fine Art Department at the University of Natal to lecture in Ceramics. This is particularly important since, at the time, Halsted-Berning was studying for a Post-Graduate Diploma majoring in Ceramics, and worked with Middlebrook. While Cruise (1991:12) contends that he introduced new radical ideas which had a substantial impact on contemporary ceramics in South Africa, the long-term impact has been refuted by both Armstrong and Halsted-Berning who claim that the move away from Anglo-orientalism was inevitable (Personal interviews conducted with Halsted-Berning and Juliet Armstrong in 1995).

The development, appreciation and recognition of ceramics in South Africa has largely been encouraged by the Association of Potters South Africa (APSA) since its formation in 1973. APSA runs regional and national exhibitions, workshops and meetings. The organisation also produces a quarterly magazine in which numerous South African ceramists are represented. APSA is in many respects a powerful organisation which controls the discipline by evaluating work in competitions and also sanctioning innovations and changes.

While in the mid 1980s, Halsted-Berning's and Ntshalintshali's approaches to ceramics were met with resistance by the association, because their use of paint on ceramics was considered



unconventional, they are currently more open-minded. Not only was Halsted-Berning's and Ntshalintshali's painted ceramics accepted, but in 1989 Ntshalintshali was awarded a joint first prize by Corobrik - sponsors of APSA.

APSA has become more receptive to less conventional approaches within the ceramic discipline, and the 1995 Regional Exhibition revealed a wide selection of techniques with many painted pieces.<sup>24</sup> In 1996 a section was introduced to regional exhibitions to include commercially made pieces which have been painted with commercial underglaze pigments and glazed. Since APSA currently aims to cater for all ceramic forms of production and decoration, they decided to recognise underglaze painting on commercially made ware as an increasingly popular activity.<sup>25</sup>

In briefly discussing the origins and historical background of the studio in Chapter One, Halsted-Berning's objectives as well as her tastes and preferences are disclosed. These are important in understanding how a distinctive Ardmore stylistic and thematic idiom emerged. In examining this style, the sources and origins of their work and the extent to which these sources are ethnically based is considered. The first part of the chapter positions Halsted-Berning as co-ordinator of the studio as well as mediator between the market and the studio. Variations of the style, through an examination of Wonderboy Nxumalo's work is explored by pin-pointing alternative sources of inspiration. The above mentioned points are seen as important in that they reflect both the artists' translations and Halsted-Berning's expectations.

In Chapter Two the work of Bonnie Ntshalintshali, one of the founding members of the studio, is discussed as the prototype for the studio style. While tracing a chronological development of her work, the notion of ethnicity, derived from her Zulu cultural identity, and the degree to which it affects her work, is examined. It becomes evident that her ethnicity is derived from an affinity<sup>26</sup> with traditional as well as western and Christian ideals and is therefore multi-cultural. The intersection of these multi-cultural sources is explored in examples of her work.

In contrast to the characteristic Ardmore idiom recognised in Chapters One and Two, Chapter Three examines the more personalised, idiosyncratic aspects of Josephine Ghesa's distinctive sculptures. In analysing her imagery, by establishing its sources, origins and influences, it becomes evident that her ethnicity is seminal to the iconography of her work. Following a discussion on the stimulation provided by Halsted-Berning and their sequential working relationship, her background is considered in terms of her possible experience of Southern Sotho material culture and mythology as well as in the context of the curio-trade that developed in the 1930s in Lesotho. This does not imply that her work was influenced solely by the curio trade, but the similarities in her work and the Southern Sotho tourist work seem to suggest that it was based on a local practice. It becomes evident that her ancestral ties form an essential source of stimulus in both her imagery and the motivation for her specific artistic expression, thereby identifying the visionary aspect of her art.

Besides these central issues outlined above, Ardmore has contributed to the changes in approaches evident in contemporary South African ceramics. The intensely decorated, sculpturally embellished, multi-coloured functional pieces produced at Ardmore could possibly be seen as the antithesis to the Leach ideal of a 'plain brown pot'. Ardmore has also addressed some of the inequalities evident in South African art, in that exposure has been given to marginalised communities, women in particular, both in terms of training and empowerment.

## ENDNOTES

1. It was decided that when referring to the employees of the Ardmore Studio, the term 'artist' should be used. It is a term that Halsted-Berning has adopted since terms such as 'workers', 'decorators', 'producers', 'ceramists' all project inherent problems in that they are either too broad or too specific.
2. The term 'contemporary black art' has implied many potential problems in that it suggests a certain exclusivity or rather a lack of inclusivity in the mainstream art circles created by largely white, urban, academically trained artists (Martin 1993:4-5 and Vogel 1991:16).
3. The term 'traditional' has been perceived by art historians as problematic, since it has been associated with the notion of a 'static', unchanging society. Vogel (1991:10) analyses the term in relation to African Art and ideology. She contends that the word should best describe rural village arts, and should become a distinct 'art-type' when considered in relation to other forms of African Art. Since all traditions are a manifestation of the society in which they exist and society is ever-changing, it seems logical to postulate that art traditions will change accordingly. Vogel (1991:32) therefore concludes that the term, when used in the correct context, needs 'no apologies, no quotation marks or prefixes'. Thus I have decided to use the term, as Vogel suggests, without punctuation marks.
4. Transitional art is identified as existing between the parameters of 'tribal' or traditional art and, more recent, mainstream arts.  
Marilyn Martin, Director of the South African National Gallery, defines 'transitional art' as:  

"one which resulted from new techniques and different economic and social conditions, the acknowledgment of the gap between the artist and the original spirit and/or the function of the object, the adaptation answering to contemporary needs and aspirations" (Martin 1990:38).

 However, the term 'transitional art' has more recently been identified as problematic. Nettleton declares that it is a thinly disguised term for the word 'primitive' (Nettleton 1988:302) and that it seems to imply an artistic 'apartheid' which separates it from mainstream art (Nettleton 1988:306).  
 All art, due to its eclectic nature, can be seen as transitional and perpetually in a state of flux or transition (Manaka 1987:2). Hence Nettleton reasons that such art reflects an interaction between historical Third World cultures and the West, and therefore exists in its own right as an expression of a particular group at a particular time (Nettleton 1988:309).
5. Although the discussion in this introduction is focused on art centres in KwaZulu-Natal, the province does not necessarily represent the position throughout South Africa.

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6. Born 1913. JW Grossert is renowned for the founding of the Ndaleni Art Centre in 1948. as the Inspector of Arts and Crafts in African schools and colleges from 1954-1962, and as the Professor of Fine Arts at the University of Durban-Westville from 1963-1974 (Ogilvie 1988: 265).
  7. Sister Pientia Selhorst (born 1914) came to South Africa in 1938 from Germany as a member of the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood to Mariannhill. After training at the Teacher's Training College in Pietermaritzburg and then in the Fine Art Department at the University of Natal, she taught art at St Francis College, Mariannhill (Leeb du Toit 1993:87 and Leeb du Toit 1989:83).
  8. Sr Maria-Johanna Senn (1930-) came to South Africa from Austria in 1961. She studied at the Technikon Natal from 1963-64 and at the University of Natal from 1965-66. She worked as a liturgical artist-in-residence at Mariannhill, acting also as advisor and agent to various black artists (Leeb du Toit 1993:88).
  9. Amilcar Cabral (1924-1973) was a black activist who led a revolt against Portuguese rule and colonial domination in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. His influence and philosophies contributed to the development of negritude and he had significant bearing on revolutions in other African countries such as Angola (Chilcote 1991).
  10. De Jager (1992:1) similarly upholds the intrinsic links between artist, society and expression. Thus this reinforces the belief that the dynamic interrelation of art and society is historically determined. De Jager indicates an interrelation between the artist and art as well as an interrelation between the artist and society. These two interrelations are not independent of each other, but together express a further relation between art and society. He emphasises that in this triadic interrelation of art, the artist and society, the artist, through his/her artistic expression, constitutes the link between art and society (1992:1). Thus there is not only an connection between art and society but also, according to De Jager (1992:1), an interdependency.
  11. Cross-cultural exchange has been used in this dissertation as an alternative to the problematic term 'acculturation'. According to the Oxford Dictionary the term 'acculturation' simply means to 'adopt another culture'. However, Herskovits (1958:6-7) suggests cultural exchange should be seen as a dynamic and ever-changing process.  
A quote from Herskovits's book seems to stimulate a point of discussion as related to the cross-cultural exchange evident at Ardmore.

"Acculturation may be taken to refer to the ways in which some cultural aspect is taken into a culture and adjusted and fitted to it. This implies some relative cultural equality between the giving and receiving cultures ....In acculturation the cultural groups involved are in an

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essentially reciprocal relationship. Both give and take. As a result it is a valid problem to consider what is adopted and what is not, and the whys and wherefores." (Herskovits 1958:7).

12. Vogel (1991:28) suggests that African artists select foreign ingredients carefully from an array of choices and insert them into a preexisting matrix in meaningful ways in terms of their own culture. Thus Vogel sees cultural exchange as part of an on-going process in the renovation of culture. However as seen at Ardmore this selection is limited by to a degree by the availability of sources provided by Halsted-Berning.
13. The term 'borrowed identity' is used by Graburn (1969:27-30). He says that when exposed to new influences from foreign cultures, a cultural group may adopt new symbols. These became absorbed into their cultural identity until it is difficult to distinguish between the original and the borrowed identities.
14. Klopper (1992:11) identifies problems associated with the notion of 'Zuluness'. In South Africa ethnicity is largely seen as an invention of apartheid created on the one hand by government officials and missionaries, and on the other hand by convergence of patriarchal interests. Klopper cites ethnicity as a consciously crafted ideological creation, not a natural cultural residue (1992:11). Therefore, in the context of this dissertation, the term 'Zulu' is used as a collective, albeit fragile term, to describe the so-called ethnic identity of the artists who are, with the exception of Ghesa, Zulu-speaking.
15. In order to understand what is meant by tourist art one needs to define the word 'tourist' in the context of this dissertation. The Oxford Dictionary describes a tourist as a traveler, especially one who travels for recreation. Jules-Rosette elaborates by defining a tourist as a pleasure seeker and consumer of the unfamiliar and exotic.  
The tourist that visits Ardmore includes both South African and foreign travelers. The work is marketed in places that are particularly frequented by tourists such as at Sun City. The gallery at the studio is part of a tourist route which draws many overseas visitors and South Africans holidaying in the surrounding Drakensberg who would otherwise not have had much interest in the art produced at the studio. These people, as well as those who buy from numerous outlets around the country, are fairly wealthy and are prepared to pay high prices for unique, hand-crafted artwork. Buyers are possibly discerning and expect in return for the high price paid for an artwork, a special, unique, handcrafted artwork, rather than a cheap, mass-produced, curio memento. Therefore, Ardmore Art, as a tourist art bears some degree of exclusivity in that it is made and sold as art, but also has popular appeal.
16. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1994.

17. The term 'Afro-ethnic' is used fairly often throughout this dissertation and therefore needs a definition. Graburn (1976:19) describes 'ethnic' as "what the outside world recognises as a small bundle of overt features". 'Afro-ethnic' could therefore simply be described as a number of overt features that are recognised by outsiders as typically African. These could include indigenous animals such as zebra, leopard, elephant etc. African prints, objects that are simply made, objects that are surrounded in some kind of mysticism.
18. Bernard Leach (1887-1979) was an English potter who was born in Hong Kong, then later worked in Japan as an etcher. Leach's first encounter with pottery was in the Japan with *raku*. He returned to England with his friend and colleague, Shoji Hamada in 1920 and set up a studio at St Ives, Cornwall (Birks 1990: 6). His work, seen as the vital link between East and West, was largely responsible for bringing a genuine understanding of Oriental expression to Europe (Hamer 1991:190).
19. William Morris (1834-1896) was an English designer, scholar, poet, writer and critic who sought to practice Ruskin and Carlyles' teachings concerning the Arts and Crafts Movement. He founded the firm Morris and Co in 1861 which aimed to put into practice many of these theories (Adams 1987).
20. Hilda Ditchburn (1917-1986) was born in the Free State and then moved to KwaZulu Natal. She Studied Fine Arts at the University of Natal before studying in London at the Central School of Art under Dora Billington. She retired from lecturing at the Ceramics in the Fine Art Department at the University of Natal after 40 years of service. Under her auspices, in 1970 the University of Natal became the only university in South Africa to award BAFA Degrees with ceramics as a major (Armstrong 1986: Obituary for Hilda Ditchburn).
21. Juliet Armstrong (1950-) studied for a Bachelor of Arts, Fine Arts at the University of Natal majoring in sculpture. In 1975 she obtained a Post-Graduate Diploma in Ceramics and Glass at the Leicester Polytechnic and then, in 1980, she obtained a Masters from the University of Natal where she focused on ceramic sculpture. She is currently a senior lecturer at the University of Natal in the Fine Art Department in Ceramics (Cruise 1991:188).
22. Malcolm MacIntyre Reid was lecturer in the Fine Art Department at the University of Natal (Toohey 1985:37).
23. David Middlebrook (1944-) works as a Funk artist in America. His work involves the surreal use of imagery combined with his whimsical sense of humour (Clark 1979:309). His irreverence for ceramic conventions sought to break from the preconceptions associated with the ceramic medium (Cruise 1991:13).

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24. Ironically, the piece that Ntshalintshali exhibited on the 1995 Regional APSA Exhibition was a conventionally glazed, functional teapot.
  25. Letter written to sponsors about the role of APSA in 1996 by Rose Jaffray, Workshop Convenor for APSA. KwaZulu-Natal.
  26. Martin (1993:5) defines 'affinity'. She defines 'affinity' as a kinship term. In cross-cultural exchange process it suggests "a deeper and more natural relationship than the term 'resemble' or 'juxtaposition'" (Martin 1993:5). 'Affinity', manifested in diversity and inventiveness, is considered as a source for the strength and vitality evident in South African contemporary art.

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE HISTORY AND ORGANISATION OF THE ARDMORE STUDIO

The studio began in 1985 after Fée Halsted-Berning (1958- ) was retrenched from a lecturing post in the Fine Art Department at the Natal Technikon. She moved to the Ardmore Farm situated in the Champagne Valley in the foothills of the Drakensberg. Here she converted a small cottage on the farm into a studio and began to pursue her interest in ceramics and subsequently initiated a ceramic enterprise involving women from the local community.<sup>1</sup>

Halsted-Berning received a formal art training from the University of Natal where she obtained a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Fine Arts. Under the tutelage of Michael Taylor<sup>2</sup>, she specialised in painting. It was at this early stage that Halsted-Berning developed an interest in surface textures, influenced by the encrusted calcined objects she saw on her travels in Greece and Turkey. Possibly influenced by other tutors (such as Dick Leigh<sup>3</sup> who was a landscape painter), she focused on landscape painting during this period.<sup>4</sup>

She then proceeded in 1982-1983 to do a Post-Graduate Diploma in Ceramics also at the University of Natal under the direction of Juliet Armstrong and Ian Calder. She continued her interest in developing the surface quality in ceramic mediums. It was at this time she also worked with David Middlebrook who was a visiting lecturer in the Fine Art Department from the United States of America. While Halsted-Berning's contemporaries were still concerned with neo-modernist, western art, Middlebrook recognised a unique quality in her work - an interest in African imagery. Since her childhood Halsted-Berning had been fascinated with African flora and fauna and collected objects such as porcupine quills and guinea fowl



feathers.<sup>5</sup> This interest in African flora and fauna was to become very important as an influence on the imagery that was to appear later at Ardmore.<sup>6</sup>

Middlebrook had a considerable impact on her work.<sup>7</sup> He encouraged her to focus on her ideas and intentions first and persuaded her not to be restricted by the technical concerns of ceramics. He taught her to constantly reassess what she was making and adapt rather than discard. As a result cracked and broken bits were incorporated into the design of the piece or mended and disguised by non-ceramic mediums. He also gave her the confidence to break away from traditional ceramic techniques by using paint rather than glaze to obtain a rich painterly surface. It could be argued that her undergraduate training in painting also predisposed her to such an approach. Nevertheless, this approach to ceramics in the early 1980s was new to South Africa. It broke away from the established Anglo-Oriental traditions set by early South African potters.

Halsted-Berning thereafter worked with studio potter, David Walters<sup>8</sup> at Caversham Mill in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands. Here she learnt about the economics of running a studio and the potential to earn a living as a ceramist. While at the studio, she made an unsuccessful attempt at making tiles making which she intended to paint. The tiles cracked so she adapted them to include 'Beatrix Potter' figurines. The figurines were originally made by her as ornaments for children. These she placed between and over the cracks and was thus able overcome the problem by using the cracks to her advantage. The pressure of having to earn a living from her work made her resourceful and innovative. This knowledge again was to come in use in the repairing of imperfect works at Ardmore.<sup>9</sup>

She subsequently accepted a position as a ceramics lecturer at the Natal Technikon in Durban. Her post (and the benefits of a monthly income) brought her back into the urban academic art context and she began making more abstract sculptures. Breaking from traditional practices of glazed functional ceramics, she continued to use clay as a medium for her sculptures. Her works included hollow clay pipes or rods which were assembled in varying formations. She used a terracotta clay and applied slip, pushed in rows of metal nails which remained partially

intact during and after firing, or scored into the surface of the clay. Other works included constructions of slabs of clay assembled into a square format, often with apertures in the centre. Terracotta clay was used and a white slip was often applied either by trailing on lines which seem to resemble the patterns on zebra skin or the imitation texture was painted on. The slip was also sometimes scratched with a fine tool to reveal the colour of the clay underneath. These pieces were often smoke-fired and the smoke flashings, which sometimes occurred as spots, seemed to suggest markings of leopard and genet pelts.

Halsted-Berning's retrenchment resulted in her relocation to the Ardmore Farm, where she was determined to pursue her career. She realized the need for an assistant and someone whom she could train. Two weeks after Halsted-Berning's arrival her domestic helper, Janet Ntshalintshali, brought her daughter Bonnie Ntshalintshali, to work with her. The latter had suffered polio as a child and found farm labour both difficult and arduous. Working in the studio would present an opportunity that could relieve Ntshalintshali from the manual labour of farm work while ensuring an income.<sup>10</sup>

Halsted-Berning began by teaching Ntshalintshali how to coil and model clay, and then encouraged her to explore her ideas. Since Halsted-Berning, at least to begin with, was the teacher and custodian, she felt it was her position to provide the stimulation for work as well as on-going training, supervision and criticism. The stimulation was largely derived from her own particular preferences and propensities for African artifacts, designs and imagery.<sup>11</sup>

Further, the initial idea was based primarily on Halsted-Berning's admiration for naivety in art also her broad understanding of African Art. As a student, and having grown up in Zimbabwe, she collected African art and curio objects, many of which she acquired in Zimbabwe, and included them in her imagery. This inherent interest in African Art, as well as her apparent love of the patterns on African animal-skins, was conveyed to Ntshalintshali as inspirational material. Halsted-Berning became excited by the idea that the information she presented to Ntshalintshali was reinterpreted through her unschooled and unspoiled vision adding to the art-making process an element that Halsted-Berning could not achieve in her own art.<sup>12</sup>

Recognising Ntshalintshali's ability to model clay and to decorate, Halsted-Berning sought a market for Ntshalintshali's work. At first, Ntshalintshali was given little due recognition. Before she came to Ardmore, Halsted-Berning had already established herself a sound reputation as an artist, and her work, subsequent to her arrival at Ardmore, had generated much public interest. She was therefore invited to exhibit at various galleries, but when she asked if Ntshalintshali could exhibit with her, her request was refused. It appeared that most gallery owners, wary of this unknown and unschooled artist, were unwilling to risk exhibiting her work or that of any inexperienced artist for that matter. However, Halsted-Berning was adamant that Ntshalintshali's work was worth exhibiting and was confident that, given the opportunity, her work would receive some form of recognition. Determined not to give up, Halsted-Berning, claimed that although Ntshalintshali had made the pieces, they were in fact designed by Halsted-Berning. Ntshalintshali's very early work was therefore exhibited under the name Halsted-Berning. At this early stage of their partnership, Halsted-Berning's nurturing of Ntshalintshali was clearly evident. She says that often she felt protective about Ntshalintshali's work, rather like "a mother pushing her child to succeed".<sup>13</sup>

As their collaborative reputation grew, they were gradually accepted into more widely by gallery owners, art critics and academics who became less sceptical of this unschooled artist. Together they claimed recognition nationally as a team, Halsted-Berning as the formally trained artist, and Ntshalintshali as the untrained, 'naive' artist. They exhibited together at numerous art galleries including the NSA in 1985 and 1988, the Durban Art Museum in 1985, Helen de Leeuw in Johannesburg in 1986, and at the Annexe Gallery in Cape Town in 1986. In 1988 Ntshalintshali's work was exhibited at numerous exhibitions in KwaZulu-Natal as well as Volkscas Atelier Exhibition, the Cape Triennial and Clay+ Exhibition in Pretoria.<sup>14</sup> This demonstrated a formal recognition of Ntshalintshali's work.

In 1989 Ntshalintshali was the joint recipient of a first prize with Carol Haywood-Fell of the Corobrik National Ceramic Award held at the Durban Art Gallery. The piece, entitled *Noah's Ark* (1988)(Figure 12), was bought by the Corobrik Collection currently housed at the Tatham Art Gallery.<sup>15</sup>

Halsted-Berning gave Ntshalintshali the training, discipline and skills that were needed to produce finely crafted work. In turn, Ntshalintshali influenced Halsted-Berning's work. From working in an abstract mode until her arrival at the farm, Halsted-Berning began to explore scenes from her life and surroundings on the farm in the form of clay plaques. Some of Ntshalintshali's figures were incorporated into the design of Halsted-Berning's sculpture. This, however, became slightly problematic since Halsted-Berning found that Ntshalintshali's building technique differed from hers. Ntshalintshali was apparently more meticulous in her manipulation of clay than Halsted-Berning's direct, spontaneous approach. She felt that the two approaches to modelling did not compliment each other and the contrast interfered with the overall visual impact.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, it became apparent that they both began to rely on each other for technical support and creative inspiration. Alan Crump, Chairman of the Standard Bank National Arts Festival Committee noted in the 1990 catalogue on Halsted-Berning and Ntshalintshali that there was a creative bond in their work. He believed their working relationship to be "the perfect solution" (Verster 1990). This was exemplified in the way the two artists interacted harmoniously by encouraging, inspiring and influencing each other's work to the extent that their working partnership for a time became inseparable.

In 1990 their partnership peaked when Halsted-Berning and Ntshalintshali jointly won the Standard Bank Young Artists Award. It was the first time that ceramic artists had been chosen as winners for the exhibition. It was also the first time the award was given as a joint prize. Alan Crump (Verster 1990) explained:

"Though their works are different, it was felt that there is such a close creative bond between them and that they rely on each other's technical and creative influences. To separate them would be a falsification of what is produced at the farm outside Winterton."

While the Halsted-Berning-Ntshalintshali partnership continued, and without any specific pre-planning, the studio expanded. It became more a community-based enterprise when Halsted-Berning accepted into the studio some of Ntshalintshali's friends from the local community who took an interest in her work. These women included Phumelele Nene, Sindy, Beauty and Osolo Ntshalintshali and Mavis and Punch Shabalala. Halsted-Berning recalls how they would come to visit Ntshalintshali, and when she went out or turned her back, they would pick up Ntshalintshali's brushes and tentatively try to paint. Halsted-Berning first encouraged Osolo to come in to help Ntshalintshali with her workload and then offered positions to the other women.<sup>17</sup> Thus when expansion occurred, it occurred partly in response to the success of Ntshalintshali, and partly as a result of the confidence that Halsted-Berning had in her teaching ability. Since there were no particular criteria envisaged at its inception, the Ardmore Studio became an example of an informal, spontaneously initiated workshop.

With the newcomers joining the studio, the cottage that Halsted-Berning first started working in with Ntshalintshali, soon became too small. The studio was then moved to its present site on the farm - part of an old stone-walled stable. The new studio has gallery space for work to be displayed and where commercial transactions take place. There is a large window at the gallery-end of the studio revealing a Drakensberg vista. An area near the kilns was allocated for glazing, packing and unpacking the kilns. An internal wall, which runs longitudinally down approximately half the length of the studio, separates the painters from the handbuilders. Josephine Ghesa, who was then joined by other sculptors such as Nhlanhla Nsundwane and Zeblon Msele, work at the far end of the studio in a space that was originally allocated for the storage of boxes and packaging. The studio is lit with florescent lights and light from outside which streams in through the window at the gallery end of the studio and through numerous stable doors.

As the studio expanded and new members joined, Halsted-Berning introduced her new trainees to new ideas. Not wanting the newcomers to draw public attention away from Ntshalintshali or have them copy her work, Halsted-Berning instituted a new approach that focused on functional ware. The newcomers were given a white bodied clay, as opposed to the terracotta

clay that Ntshalintshali was accustomed to using. To this white-bodied clay, decoration was be applied with commercial under-glaze pigments and then glazed with a transparent glaze. This new line of work became stylistically distinctive and has become identified with a perceived 'Ardmore style'.<sup>18</sup> Because of the functional aspect of the work and because of the manner in which it is made, it carries possible production-ware associations. Nonetheless, each piece that is produced is unique and like no other. Ironically, however, although the work is functional, buyers apparently seldom utilise the ware, preferring to keep it for ornamental and display purposes.

The functional ware produced at Ardmore has met with considerable success since it seems to exhibit qualities which have a wide appeal to the gallery owner, the art investor and the art critic alike. The demand for the work over the last few years is becoming increasingly higher than the rate of production and Halsted-Berning says that the artist cannot make the work fast enough to supply the demand.<sup>19</sup>

The decoration capitalises on a stereotypical African imagery that appealed to Halsted-Berning and might appeal to both local and overseas buyers. Content and style have developed as a result of the interaction with and the expectations of Halsted-Berning. From the time the newcomers arrive, they are plied with images of animals, birds and flowers from diverse sources including weekly women's magazines, books on flora and fauna and exclusive interior decorating magazines. During numerous visits to the studio, I have observed a diverse selection of magazines such as *You*, *Style*, *Time*, and the *Financial Mail* being used as sources of inspiration. Figure 1 demonstrates the sort of material that is pinned up around the studio. Halsted-Berning says she regularly uses the *Architectural Digest*, *Interiors* and the *National Geographic* as sources of inspiration as well as bird, wildlife and gardening books such as *Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa* and *A Field Guide to the Larger Mammals of Africa* by Dorst and Dandelot. Their absorption and modification developed into a well-defined Ardmore style that newcomers could follow and to which innovations could constantly be added.

Hence the style was partly forged by Halsted-Berning in terms of her personal notions of what ethnicity, 'naivety' and 'primitive' comprise. To Halsted-Berning, these are all considered pleasing qualities in art and she therefore reveals similarities in her preferences to the early twentieth century Modernists or Primitivists who sought much of their inspiration from African and Oceanic art (Calder 1987).<sup>20</sup>

However, Halsted-Berning feels that her academic training and cultural background have thwarted her sense of 'naivety', and she notes that in her own work, naivety would appear contrived. She perceives Ardmore work as an extension and exploration of her own creativity where a more genuine 'naivety' can be rendered.<sup>21</sup> To Halsted-Berning the work appears to arouse a sense of vicarious fulfilment.

Hence what is commonly perceived as peculiar to the 'Ardmore Style' could be defined as follows: the ware is essentially functional and is often highly ornate. It is made from white-bodied clay and is usually hand-built using the coil method of construction or thrown on the wheel. The pieces are often embellished with relief or 'sprigged' motifs of flowers, leaves or animals. The animals include zebra, giraffe, leopard, genet, baboon, crocodile, fish, guineafowl and snakes. Forms of vessels are frequently inspired by (and the adapted from) European, particularly English ceramics.<sup>22</sup>

According to Halsted-Berning, the English influence on Ardmore emanates mainly from Creamware (particularly Staffordshire Pottery and Pratt Ware) and Delftware. This is specifically evident in the use of a white background, obtained from the use of a tin glaze or a white earthenware clay body which is then painted with enamel or underglaze pigments. Creamware apparently was not made to imitate porcelain. Rather it developed a character which became an essentially English earthenware tradition which displayed qualities such as "fine form, thin body, clean and brilliant glaze which formed the perfect background for the indigenous, harmonious and free painting of the earthenware enamellers of that time" (Towner 1978:19). Besides the possibilities of painting a white-bodied clay, it was perhaps the spontaneity in free painting and unsophisticated quality of Staffordshire and Pratt Ware that

appealed to Halsted-Berning, prompting her to emulate these aspects in directing the development of Ardmore art.

One of the most distinctive features of Ardmore studio ware is the inclusion of handles, spouts and knobs which are transformed into animals typically zebra, guinea fowl, giraffe and leopard. In this, Ardmore ware shows further similarities to Staffordshire and Pratt Ware which frequently incorporated elaborate handles, knobs and spouts into the design of the piece (Towner 1978: 20). Ardmore vessels are often anthropomorphized by the addition of feet, a feature commonly seen in the ware produced by some Creamware Potteries. Further, stamped motifs, similar to the sprigged motifs applied to the Ardmore ware, were often applied on Creamware (Towner 1978:20).

Once Ardmore ware has been bisque fired to approximately 900C, it is decorated with bright Duncan, Amaco and Mayco underglaze pigments. When the painting is complete, the work is refired to burn out any gums that may cause the glaze to resist. The work is fired for a third time after a shiny transparent earthenware glaze has been applied. Black underglaze is used to outline patterned animal and plants motifs, while vibrant colours are used in varying combinations to fill the motifs on a white-bodied clay. This has contributed to the striking appearance that has become characteristic of the 'Ardmore Style'. In addition to the animals and plants, the surface of a vessel is enhanced by a congruence of patterns which are made up of dots, lines and other small brush marks which form intricate patterns. The natural markings on animals' pelts (typically African animals) are frequently and meticulously replicated.

A range of motifs, derived from images of the above mentioned African imagery (fish scale, leopard print, zebra stripe and floral motifs) are repeated in varying combinations. To this melting pot of ideas, a few elements of their own cultural contexts are added. These are derived from grass mats, beadwork, *isishweshwe*<sup>23</sup>, da Gama, oriental and other fabric designs. Figure 2 demonstrates three woman dressed in clothes made from a variety of such fabrics and can usually be seen dressed in such a manner. In visiting a few trading stores in the Winterton area<sup>24</sup> it became evident that these fabrics, supplied by shop-owners, were favoured by women



customers who bought the fabric to sew garments. They are frequently encouraged by Halsted-Berning to draw from these patterns for their ceramic designs.

An African animal motif is usually placed in such a manner that it forms a focal point around which decorative motifs are positioned. The translation of animal motifs by the artists from source to end product raises an interesting issue. The motifs in early works were copied directly from images in wildlife books. *A Field Guide to the Larger Mammals of Africa*, often used in the studio, depicts pages of biological drawings of African animals. The book was published for the identification of African animals and therefore the animals are represented as standing in profile so as to display the full length of the body. Thus the artists' translations were fairly direct and literal. As the artists became more familiar with the animals, Halsted-Berning encouraged them to depict animals in motion. Instead of one leopard being placed in the centre of a composition, the leopard devouring a zebra, or two giraffes stretching their necks to browse the tree-tops would be depicted. Gradually, as the books have worn out through use, and the translated images have become more conceptualised, the artist's interpretation of animal motifs have often become more adventurous in their reinterpretation.

While in appearance the end result has a distinctly naive, Afro-ethnic, indigenous character, closer inspection sometimes reveals the inclusion of exotic flora and fauna. Figure 3 *Vase with Tigers and Deer* (1994) depicts a vase made by Bonnie Ntshalintshali that has images of tigers and deer, as well as zebra and guinea fowl incorporated into the design. Ntshalintshali seemingly does not distinguish between African and non-African animals but is rather drawn to the interesting and variegated markings on the animals' pelts. This is indicative of the eclectic sources used in forging what is ostensibly an Africanness which has been consciously crafted by Halsted-Berning, but equally loosely translated by the studio artists.

Although the term, Ardmore style, suggests stylistic coherence and is used rather loosely to describe the collective group of artists working in a common space using the same medium and sources for their imagery. Thus the term arises from a perceived thematic and stylistic link in the work. However, it is evident that within this main style there are sub-styles and variations.

For example, some painters seem to experience a sense of *horor vacui* (Figure 4) and hence tend to embellish the vessel entirely with patterned motifs. Other decorators, particularly Phumelele Nene, Osolo and Bonnie Ntshalintshali, tend to leave undecorated areas of white around their animal and floral motifs thus enhancing the motif as seen in Figure 3.

Further, the term 'Ardmore style' should only be used when referring to the white-ware underglaze painted functional studio ware. Individual artists working at the studio such as Bonnie Ntshalintshali, Josephine Ghesa and Wonderboy Nxumalo, who have developed their own idioms, and whose work remains stylistically different from the rest of the studio's, should perhaps be seen as individuals working within the context of the Ardmore Studio.

The training of black artists in South Africa is presently receiving considerable attention by art historians as Elizabeth Rankin's text entitled *Images in Wood: Aspects of the History of Sculpture in 20th Century South Africa* from 1989. In each training initiative there is a complex cross-cultural interaction in which the perceptions of the teacher, the recipient and the audience act as a stimulus for production. This phenomenon, reflected in a constantly flexible symbiosis between maker and evaluator, is exemplified in the relationship between Halsted-Berning and each of the artists.

Training at Ardmore involves an apprenticeship during which the newcomer either learns to paint with commercial underglaze pigments or to handbuild under the guidance of a more experienced artist in the studio. Apprentices often include schoolgirls who come to the studio during the weekends and holidays to earn pocket money by painting small pieces such as eggcups. A contract is signed in which the conditions of employment, expectations, and terms of payment are set out.

The terms and methods of payment have been revised since the studio's inception, necessitated by the changing needs of the studio. Nevertheless artists are paid a percentage of the selling price which varies from ten to fifty percent according to the status of the artist. Up until 1994, artists were also paid a nominal rate of four rand for every day that they came to the studio.

However Halsted-Berning found that the artists rate of production began to decline.<sup>25</sup> She then introduced a new method where the artists are paid purely on commission. The most recent method of payment, introduced in 1996, is essentially incentive-driven. Artists are paid a lower percentage for their work, however they are given bonuses for work which is exceptionally well executed or for work that is unique, different and ironically challenges the conventional Ardmore style. Halsted-Berning says that this method of payment has initiated more innovative work that is of a higher quality. Most of the artists are in fact earning more from this method of remuneration than from the previous methods.<sup>26</sup> Ghesa, whose work sells only at irregular intervals, is paid a retainer in order that she can have a monthly income.

The skills acquired for detailed painting and controlled hand-building required at Ardmore are considerable. It is interesting to note that of the twenty-seven artists interviewed,<sup>27</sup> those who painted had higher education qualifications (about Std 7) compared with those who hand-built (they on average had about a Std 1). It appears that most of the hand-builders are illiterate and many have experienced difficulty in using a paintbrush or pencil.<sup>28</sup> Those who have an aptitude to paint continue to do so while it appears that the weaker painters are marginalized into hand-building. This specialization does not seem to affect working relationships in the studio or create rivalry as a prolific hand-builder can earn as much as a painter.<sup>29</sup>

In the same interview it was noted that most of the artists, prior to coming to Ardmore, did not participate in any craft activities nor did they come from families who made any crafts, save weaving sleeping mats and crocheting<sup>30</sup> (See Appendix 1).

Although Halsted-Berning provides guidance, on-going training, criticism, tuition, space, materials and equipment, the main attraction to the studio is employment. The motivation for the production of work at Ardmore can be compared to that of Zulu bead sculptors.

"The artists own words reveal that it was the desire to make money that initiated the production of commercial beadwork and later beadwork" (Preston-Whyte 1991:76).

Hence Preston-Whyte attributes the innovation of these bead sculptures to two factors - the skill and latent creativity of the makers, and the impetus provided by market opportunities (Preston-Whyte 1991:76).

Since the incentive at Ardmore to produce work is to a large extent economically driven and given that most of the artists at Ardmore are single-parent women, they have been able to provide personally for their families.

Besides these financial attractions, pleasant working conditions, freedom from household chores and from demanding physical labour are also possible attractive aspects of the studio. It must be acknowledged that without Halsted-Berning's intervention the Ardmore artists would still possibly be farm labourers or unemployed. The studio has reached saturation point with over forty artists producing work in the Ardmore style.

Invaluable assistance in the form of glazing, the packing and unpacking of kilns and firing was (until recently) afforded by Phineus Mveli. From his managerial status, he reinforced Halsted-Berning's ideas in the making and decorating of pieces, and, being older than most other artists, acted as father figure.<sup>31</sup> Mveli, trained by production potter David Walters in the 1970s, throws and decorates functional tableware. It is interesting to note that Mveli was trained in the Anglo-Oriental tradition and is a competent stoneware potter, yet at Ardmore his work is in keeping with the style and medium of the studio. Mveli moved with Halsted-Berning to the Springvale Farm at the beginning of 1996 where he producing thrown ware for the Ardmore Studio. His managerial role has been replaced by Moses Nqubuka.

While the discussions in this chapter have so-far outlined a character that is typical of the studio, the training and operations of the studio, and Chapters Two and Three identify Ntshalintshali and Ghesa's as imagery as partly influenced by their respective cultural experiences or affinities. Wonderboy Nxumalo's<sup>32</sup> imagery also originates from his cultural experience. However, his experience has a strong urban and Rastafarian influence.

At Ardmore, Wonderboy became acquainted with a farm labourer who was a Rastafarian.<sup>33</sup> As a follower of his friend's teachings, Wonderboy subscribed to typical Rastafarian ethics which include a puritan lifestyle and the espousing of peace and serenity. Not believing in killing, he became a vegetarian and a promoter of peace and harmony. Gradually, these attitudes began to determine the content of his work.<sup>34</sup>

Prior to coming to the Ardmore Studio, Wonderboy<sup>35</sup> spent his pastime sketching images of 'rambo-type' military figures with guns or Zulu warriors engaged in combat. Figures 5 and 5a depict pages from his sketch book from 1994. Figures from these early drawings, reappeared in more recent works in more critical depiction of Zulu history. In a series of works from the beginning of 1995 on the Zulu Wars, he focused on Shaka's leadership. Given his Rastafarian outlook and passivity, he rejected the autocratic and tyrannical rule of Shaka. Thus while he may still utilise themes of conflict and aggression, these are usually indictments of violence.

Much of his visual inspiration to date comes from images seen in magazines such as *Drum* and from illustrations in Zulu literature.<sup>36</sup> Figure 6c from 1996 depicts a plate which is decorated with reference to an illustrated book entitled *The Zulu Warrior* (Figure 6a). His work is also influenced by animated characters of children's television series such as *Thundercats* (Figure 6b).<sup>37</sup>

He also frequently depicts animals which are personifications of good and evil in an allegorical or satirical context. In addition, he often includes a written message or story. While these inscriptions are usually humorous, they amplify the visual imagery of his work.

Wonderboy's work has tended more towards graphic imagery rather than the painterly, decorative, floral iconography favoured by the greater number of studio artists. Halsted-Berning recognised that his finely drawn images lost their impact with the addition of colour, and showed him prints by, John Muafangejo<sup>38</sup>. While Muafangejo worked in wood, lino, and etching focusing on religious and political themes, similarities exist between their work which must have prompted Halsted-Berning to look specifically at Muafangejo's work. Muafangejo

often included an inscription or written narrative to reinforce his imagery. His use of black and white, heightened by the hard-edged lines emphasises the strong decorative qualities achieved by a the repetition of marks used describe the textures of objects such as bricks, vegetation, hair and beads (de Jager 1992:90).

Halsted-Berning not only encouraged Wonderboy to pay attention to his written messages, but also to work in monochrome. Using black underglaze, he was shown by Halsted-Berning how to cover the entire ceramic surface, then scratch out his image with a needle. Hence his work often resembles etching rather than underglaze painting. While the inclusion of the written word was an idea of Halsted-Berning's<sup>39</sup> and was initially derived from John Muafangejo's works, an analogy can be drawn between Wonderboy's work and English folk or peasant ware and in Delftware from the mid nineteenth century (Ray 1977:129-134 and Ayres 1968:142-150).

In fostering Wonderboy, Halsted-Berning reveals a willingness to encourage individuals to pursue a personal expression and forge their own idiom. Although she acknowledges the fact that Wonderboy's work reveals stylistic similarities to wood-cut prints done by many black South African artists, she feels that working in a ceramic medium distinguishes Wonderboy from such artists.<sup>40</sup> Because of Wonderboy's tendency to towards drawing, he has been given the opportunity to work with Malcolm Christian<sup>41</sup> at Caversham Press on a regular basis. This intervention again suggests that Halsted-Berning is using her informed erudition successfully to steer her artists in the direction which serves their needs.

Wonderboy has exhibited on numerous group exhibitions including the NSA in Durban (1994), the Gallery-on-Tyrone in Johannesburg (1994 and 1995), Kim Sacks in Johannesburg (1995) and print exhibition entitled *The Spirit of Our Stories: Images of African Narrative* in Grahamstown (1995) and the Tatham Art Gallery (1996). This exhibition represented a collection of prints made in by Christian in collaboration with selected contemporary South African artists. While Christian provided the source material, technical advise and did the printing, the artists produced the image.<sup>42</sup>

In examining Halsted-Berning's role in the studio, one also needs to consider certain economic responsibilities that she has undertaken in order to run the studio. She provides the capital to furnish the studio with raw materials, equipment, packaging as well as other general running costs. Appendix 5 indicates average monthly running costs for the studio. Once the work is finished, Halsted-Berning pays the artists a percentage of the selling price for the work and has to recoup her outlay by marketing the work. Halsted-Berning promotes the work in South Africa and overseas. Outlets include a gallery in the studio, a gallery at Springvale, Rosetta and other upmarket galleries and exclusive outlets around the country. Halsted-Berning has outlets in Belgium, Switzerland, Germany and has made numerous contacts in the United States of America, Britain and France. Over the last few years, the sales to overseas outlets has increased and Halsted-Berning estimates that about forty percent of the work is sent on consignment overseas. However, since most of the outlets that stock Ardmore work in South Africa are largely supported the foreign tourist market, she reckons that the amount of work that enters private collections outside the country is fairly substantial.<sup>43</sup>

The art is nevertheless patronised mainly by a white market which constitutes a key stimulus for the production of wares made at Ardmore. Halsted-Berning mediates between the market and the makers and thus becomes the 'cultural broker' that Preston-Whyte and Thorpe describe. The 'cultural broker' was a term first used by Jules-Rosette in 1984. It describes the intermediary; generally the trader or art critic, who acts "simultaneously as the arbitrator of style and taste and as the predominant medium through which commercial transactions take place."

Preston-Whyte (1991:75) uses the words of Eric Wolfe (1956) and Clifford Geertz (1959) to describe such 'brokers' as "facilitators, interpreters and intermediaries between different cultural worlds". She adds that the artistic context of the broker is often a western one, different to that of the artists and craftspeople with whom the broker is dealing. She further contends that the effects of oppression subsequent to colonisation have resulted in poor economic conditions and retarded social development as well as limiting educational opportunities (Preston-Whyte 1991:75). The cultural broker therefore has a unique function in that:

"rather than [to] simply facilitate the relationship between two different groups separated by social, economic, or political distance, the broker actually constitutes, molds, and refines the very nature of that relationship" (Steiner 1993:155).

As intercessor between the audience and artist, Halsted-Berning, is able to separate the context in which the work is made and the context in which she favours selling the work. The quantity of production ware manufactured in the studio could prompt critics to question the aesthetic merit of the ware as art. The success of the studio has led to economic prosperity and as a result of Halsted-Berning demands high prices for the work. The work is marketed to exclusive up-market outlets and galleries and the work is acknowledged as an exclusive art. In the latest (1997) brochures printed for the studio, she has named the work 'Ardmore Ceramic Art' and thus, by emphatically stating what that work is art, she has repudiated possible problems that are associated with the ambiguous nature regarding its position as fine art or tourist art.

However, a factor that distinguishes Halsted-Berning from a cultural broker, is that her vested interest is not solely financial. Her relationship with the studio, as a manifestation of her own creativity, gives her added motivation for her involvement in the studio. It is presumably in a personal desire to maintain a certain standard in the work because criticisms of poor workmanship would probably be directed at her. One of her roles is, therefore, that of a quality controller.

Although the overall impression of the studio is that it is seemingly successful and prosperous, more in-depth study reveals potential problems. Remuneration is a major incentive for many of the artists to continue working. Despite the fact that Halsted-Berning offers competitive wages in relation to the rate of payment for the local farm labourers and domestics, the artists generally regard the rate of payment as low.<sup>44</sup> Halsted-Berning, on the other hand, maintains that competent artists who come on a daily basis and whose work is of a high standard can receive substantial earnings.<sup>45</sup>



Further, while the training at Ardmore provides the artists with specific skills in handbuilding and decorating, they remain somewhat inextricably bound to the studio and its infrastructure. If they were to become detached from the studio and have to operate independently, one wonders whether they would survive by adapting to new styles and mediums. Halsted-Berning maintains that she would provide them with some kind of certification if so required.

The studio seems to exhibit a kind of synergism - that is the studio is more than the sum of its artists. Thus the working relationship between Halsted-Berning and the studio reflects an interdependence. Although Halsted-Berning may be gaining both financially as well as realising a sense of artistic achievement from the studio, she remains intrinsic to its very existence.

Halsted-Berning recently has become aware of the degree of dependency that the artists and the studio have on her input. This awareness came about largely due to her relocating in early 1996 with her husband and children to the Springvale Farm in Rosetta, about one hour away from the Ardmore Farm. Since it would be impossible to move the studio and all the artists to the Springvale Farm, Halsted-Berning has had to reassess her future role in the studio. Thus the need for greater self-sufficiency and independence has been recognised. This self-sufficiency involves the implementation of a whole new way of thinking and training with the artists coming under the guidance of Moses Nqubuka<sup>46</sup> and Ian Garrett<sup>47</sup>. While Nqubuka's role is to deal with the customers, orders, supervise the packing and firing of kilns and manage the studio, Garrett's role is to stimulate the workers with new ideas, assist with technical problems and offer criticism. Halsted-Berning has explained to the artists that the future of the studio hinges on their performance in working together and maintaining high standards of quality.

Although the Introduction to this dissertation contextualises Ardmore in terms of contemporary Black art and contemporary ceramics in South Africa, many similarities can be drawn from the potteries that existed in England from the late nineteenth to mid twentieth centuries. As with the potteries in England, people from the surrounding area came as unskilled workers to seek employment. They received training and worked in their specialized field. The average worker had little to do with the formation of a style within the studio - that was for the

designers. Initially women were employed for the less skilled chores and were paid less than their male colleagues which resulted in many labour disputes (Buckley 1990:1-12). A distinct division in labour resulted in women being limited to painting and decorating while men were responsible for making the forms. Inspired by theories of the Arts and Crafts Movement, the work developed towards an 'art pottery' where the concept of 'art' was applied to everyday objects (Buckley 1990:70-74).<sup>48</sup>

While the Ardmore Studio comprises mainly female workers, a division of labour still persists in that one person builds the ware and another is responsible for decorating. However, this division is not gender related despite the fact that Mveli is the thrower in the studio. His role as thrower is simply due to his having acquired skills before coming to Ardmore.

Although Halsted-Berning has never made the connection, there are also certain similarities between Ardmore and the Arts and Crafts Movement of the Late Nineteenth Century. The ideal of the handmade object is important to both followers of the Arts and Crafts Movement and to Halsted-Berning. However, handmade arts and crafts are often both labour-intensive and expensive to produce. Thus the art manufactured during the Arts and Crafts Movement was exclusive and only accessible to the elite (Anscombe 1978: 139), which to a degree, also applies to art produced by the Ardmore Studio.

Ideologies of the Arts and Crafts Movement included a suggestion that art or craft could contribute to the betterment of society, and alleviate mechanised, industrial labour (Adams 1987:11&18). Although Halsted-Berning did not consciously set out to address sociological issues when she expanded the Ardmore Studio, she acknowledges that the existence of the studio has inevitably proffered social benefits which were common to the ideologies of the Arts and Crafts Movement, and are relevant to the current socio-economic situation in South Africa.

This chapter has raised a number of pertinent issues. Firstly, it was established that Halsted-Berning was partly responsible for initiating an 'Ardmore style'. The style was based primarily

on her desire for an indigenous expression and on her aesthetic predilections and she sees the work and the studio as a by-product of her own creativity.<sup>49</sup> It was noted that although her role was to nurture, stimulate, criticise, and encourage, it was also that of a broker.

Secondly, to the artists, the studio represents a secure, stimulating and prestigious environment in which to acquire certain creative skills while earning a living. Although credit must be given to Halsted-Berning for her input, recognition given to artists for their ability to assimilate visual material into a distinctive and skilfully crafted, hand made artwork. Thus the success of the work produced at the studio must lie in the way Halsted-Berning's trained eye and the inherent and acquired skills of the workers have been consolidated.

## ENDNOTES

1. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1994.
2. Michael Taylor was trained in design in Britain and lectured from 1972-1981 in painting in the Fine Art Department at the University of Natal.
3. Dick Leigh (1940-1993) was a lecturer in Fine Arts, Art History and Art Education at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg for twenty-three years. Before his resignation (due to ill health) in 1993, he was appointed Head of Department (Natal Witness 1993).
4. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1995.
5. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1995.
6. Since the focus of this dissertation is on the Ardmore Studio, I have elected not to discuss examples of Halsted-Berning's work. It will be shown, however, that much of the Ardmore style is based on her preferences.
7. Halsted-Berning says that many of Middlebrook's ideas are still in evidence in her work. She, however, feels that the whole approach of the studio is different to that of her own and Middlebrook's ideas have had little to no influence on the current aesthetics and metaphysics of the studio (Personal interviews conducted in 1995).
8. David Walters currently works and lives in England. While he lived in South Africa, he taught ceramics in the Fine Art Department at the University of Natal until 1976 (Toohey 1985:37). He also lived and worked as a potter making mostly reduction-fired stoneware at Caversham Mill in the Midlands in KwaZulu-Natal.
9. Personal interviews conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1994 and 1995.
10. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1994.
11. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1995.
12. Personal interviews conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1994 and 1995.
13. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1994.

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14. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1994.
  15. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1994.
  16. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1995.
  17. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1994.
  18. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1994.
  19. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in August 1996.
  20. Like many of the Primitivist artists such as Matisse, Picasso, Braque, Derain and Vlaminck (Calder 1987:37), Halsted-Berning has a personal collection of African Art. This collection comprises numerous African masks collected from various sources including Art Africa in Johannesburg, Batonka stools bought in Zimbabwe, a wooden door-frame from a German mission station in Zimbabwe and several wood carvings.
  21. Personal interviews conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1995.
  22. Despite the fact that much of the work was rooted in the artists' cultural identity and Halsted-Berning's partiality to Afro-ethnic themes and an apparent 'naivety', the association of Halsted-Berning's western training and background with English traditions has had significant but less obvious impact.
  23. *Isishweshwe*, Jereman or Jelman is a printed cotton fabric popularly worn by Zulu, Xhosa and Sotho women. The fabric is usually brown or indigo and is printed with a white pattern of fine floral, organic and geometric designs. The fabric was originally imported in the late nineteenth century from Germany. At the turn of the century to the 1960s the cloth was manufactured in Manchester, Britain where it was made solely for exportation to South Africa. It is currently being produced by Da Gama Textiles in Queenstown, Eastern Cape (Leeb-du Toit 1995:118).
  24. Survey conducted by Leeb-du Toit and Mentis in August 1994.
  25. Personal interview with Halsted-Berning conducted in 1994.
  26. Personal interview with Halsted-Berning conducted in 1996.
  27. Personal interviews conducted by Leeb-du Toit and Mentis in June 1994.

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28. Personal interviews conducted by Leeb-du Toit and Mentis in June 1994.
  29. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1994.
  30. Survey conducted with the artists by Leeb-du Toit and Mentis in June 1994
  31. As a man supervising a studio consisting predominantly of women he probably further elicits the degree of respect that a traditional Zulu-speaking woman would show a male.
  32. Although his full name is Wonderboy Tokozani Nxumalo, I have chosen to refer to him as Wonderboy and not Nxumalo, as he is known to Halsted-Berning, to the studio and in the art world as 'Wonderboy'.
  33. Rastafarianism is a religious cult which started in Jamaica in the 1930s among the poor and landless inhabitants. The movement was inspired by Marcus Garvey's *Back to Africa Movement* and the accession of Ras Tafari as Emperor of Ethiopia who was regarded as the Messiah of black people. The movement was anti-establishment and bitter about racial issues (Eliade 1987:95-97). It was concerned largely with personal salvation and followers were expected to live in harmony with nature, eat only vegetables, and wear their hair in dreadlocks. Male followers were expected to grow beards. The smoking of marijuana was seen as important in maintaining a peaceful, mystical existence (Hinnels 1984:411).
  34. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1995.
  35. Wonderboy is not from the Winterton/Loskop area and did not come to the Studio in the same way that his colleagues did. He was born in the Greytown area in 1975. The drawings that he did at home were seen by his mother's employer (Mrs Roydon-Turner), who had heard of the success at Ardmore. Recognising Wonderboy's potential in finding a career as an artist, she contacted Halsted-Berning who agreed to take Wonderboy in to the studio.
  36. Personal interview conducted with Wonderboy in March 1996.
  37. Personal interview conducted with Wonderboy in March 1996.
  38. John Muafangejo (1943-1987) was a Namibian born artist who trained and then later worked at Rorke's Drift ELC as an artist-in-residence. He is noted for his woodcut and linocut prints (Leeb du Toit 1993:68).
  39. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1996.

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40. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1995.
41. Malcolm Christian was trained in England in photography and printmaking and lectured in Fine Arts at the University of Natal (Toohey 1985:40). He currently runs Caversham Press, which is situated in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands near Lidgetton in an old converted church. The press, the only one of its kind in South Africa, in operates as a fully equipped printmaking studio where artists are invited to create graphic work under the guidance of Christian, a master printmaker (Standard Bank 1991:2).
42. Interview conducted with Christian in March 1997.
43. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in March 1997.
44. Personal interviews conducted by Leeb-du Toit and Mentis in June 1994.
45. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1995.
46. Nqubuka has been at the studio since the beginning of 1995. Like all the artists at the studio, he has no art training. Before coming to Ardmore Nqubuka worked as a petrol attendant. Halsted-Berning employed him to assist with the sales in the studio. Gradually, while working with Halsted-Berning, he has become more involved in the artistic side by learning to pack kilns, glaze, price the work, pack the work which is to be exported and offer criticism and support to his colleagues.
47. Ian Garrett was born in 1971, In 1992 he completed his BAFA from Rhodes University before registering for a Post Graduate Diploma in Fine Arts, Ceramics from University of Natal in 1993. In 1997 he graduated with distinction for his MAFA from the same university.
48. These art potteries included Minton, Doulton and Wedgwood.
49. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1996.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### BONNIE NTSHALINTSHALI AND MULTICULTURALISM

Bonnie Ntshalintshali can be considered a seminal figure in the growth and success of the Ardmore Studio as she was the first person to work with Halsted-Berning and her responsiveness and ability led to further expansion of the studio. Initially Ntshalintshali was receptive to Halsted-Berning's training but then was quick to forge her own idiom, encouraged to do so by Halsted-Berning. She has also become a key figure in defining the ethos and identity of the studio. In this chapter the development in Ntshalintshali's work is traced while attention is also given to the nature of assimilation, and the extent to which her cultural identity informs her work.

Ntshalintshali was born at the Ardmore Farm in 1967<sup>1</sup> and was educated at Loskop Mountain View Primary School, and Sizathena High School, Loskop Township (KwaZulu-Natal) where she completed her Form Three in 1984. Her late teens and early twenties were spent as an employee of Halsted-Berning's husband, James, tomato picking and maize harvesting.<sup>2</sup>

As discussed in Chapter One, Ntshalintshali was invited to work with Halsted-Berning who required assistance in the studio. After showing her how to coil and model in clay, Halsted-Berning encouraged Ntshalintshali to copy a small Zimbabwean clay guineafowl. Halsted-Berning admits<sup>3</sup> that the copies were clumsy and the form was weak. However, days later Ntshalintshali started making her own birds which showed greater ingenuity and skill in modelling form. She developed her own style with, what Halsted-Berning describes as, 'startling originality' (Verster 1990). This was typified by a keen and meticulous sense in the modelling and manipulation of the clay with great attention devoted to surface texture.



Halsted-Berning maintains that from the time Ntshalintshali began working with clay she had a special feeling for it (Verster 1990) implying that her ability was inherent.

These early pieces were modelled with such skill that Halsted-Berning decided it was a pity to leave them as ornamental objects since buyers might then interpret them as 'bric-a-brac'.<sup>4</sup> Halsted-Berning, realizing Ntshalintshali's creative potential, decided to extend and challenge her by introducing a functional dimension to her work. Halsted-Berning possibly perceived that functional work would sell more readily.<sup>5</sup> The animals were easily adapted into candlestick holders which were kept simple with single animal compositions or two animals joined to form an interesting configuration. Figure 7 entitled *Birds* (1988) depicts a candlestick holder that comprises two brightly-coloured birds standing side by side. Provision has been made for the candles to be placed in wells positioned on the back of each of the birds which are supported on robust legs. Although the attention to detail and bold, bright use of colour are discussed later in this text, her early sculptures begin to reveal an innate sense of colour and design as well as a propensity for fine detailed decoration.

Under Halsted-Berning's instruction, Ntshalintshali became more experienced, and began to experiment by joining the animals in various ways, resulting in more complex compositions. Figure 8, *Animal Candlestick Holder*, consists of animals in a two-tiered composition. Figure 9, *Animal Candlestick Holder II*, shows a similar yet more complex composition. The animals, mostly African (the use of indigenous imagery in her work will be discussed later in this text), are depicted in pairs, perhaps in anticipation of the sculpture of *Noah's Ark* (1988)(Figure 12) that was to follow.

Ntshalintshali has continued to date to model and paint various animal candlestick holders. Figure 10 shows a selection of candlestick holders including a pair of warthog, a genet devouring a guinea fowl and a pair of jackal. The sources for these candlestick-holders would most likely be derived from images seen in books in the studio.

As part of her early training she was also encouraged to draw. Her drawings were mainly of animals, especially farm animals, birds and buck that are still found in the surrounding rural area. Figure 11 shows a page from one of Ntshalintshali's early sketchbooks which contains isolated images of a bird, a guineafowl, a crane, a Kudu and a leopard. Another page (Figure 11a) reveals drawings of a goat, a dog and a cow and calf. Most of the drawings have a hard-edged outline with detail contained between the lines and virtually no modelling. It is interesting to note that she used small dots and marks to replicate in great detail the texture of the animal's pelt, for example the spots of a leopard or the feathers of a crane as seen in Figure 11a. This use of a small painstaking mark is a feature that she progressively developed and a texture that is repeated in all her sculptures. Halsted-Berning paid little attention to these early drawings, focusing rather on clay modelling, but in retrospect, she acknowledges that these drawings showed considerable potential.

Once Ntshalintshali had finished modelling her clay objects they had to be fired. After the first bisque firing, treatment of the surface was considered. Glazing the pieces was one possibility. However, during the ceramic firing processes, pieces are often lost through some technical fault. Halsted-Berning did not want to initially inhibit Ntshalintshali with glazing techniques or disappoint her with unsuccessful firings, so in keeping with her own idiom of using paint on ceramics, she encouraged Ntshalintshali to follow suite. This meant also that pieces that broke or cracked in the first firing could be mended with non-ceramic material and painted.<sup>6</sup>

Hence another aspect of her talent was revealed when Halsted-Berning gave Ntshalintshali paint and brushes to decorate her pieces. She responded instantly to the immediate and intense colour of Plaka acrylic paint. Her sense of colour and decoration as well as extreme patience, enhances in the finest detail, the texture and the sculptural qualities of her work. She was noted for taking care in incorporating every last detail into the design. Her interest in embellishing the surface of her sculptures seems to parallel Halsted-Berning's concern with the surface quality of her own work. Attention to surface detail is an indirect influence of Halsted-Berning's but also largely a result of Ntshalintshali's fastidious nature.

Their use of paint on ceramics, and the subsequent acceptance of unglazed ceramics by purist ceramists, has in many ways challenged and modified the attitudes to ceramic ware in South Africa. The Association of Potters in South Africa (APSA) at first refused Ntshalintshali's and Halsted-Berning's entries for exhibition due to their unconventional approach to treating the surface of their sculptures since they were viewed as not conforming to the parameters set by the conventions of functional, glazed ceramics. While this may suggest that both Ntshalintshali and Halsted-Berning collectively and intentionally challenged the conventions acknowledged by APSA, this was not entirely true. Their use of paint on ceramics was partly as a result of their limited knowledge of glazing. They nevertheless remained stylistically different from each other.

As Ntshalintshali's confidence grew so her sculptures changed. The early candlestick holders became more complex and the figures were stacked one on top of another to gain more height. However the sculptures were limited in size since the sheer weight of the clay used to make a sculpture might cause tensions in the structure and stress cracks could develop. Halsted-Berning therefore suggested she make the sculpture in pieces which could be stacked in much the same way as a tiered wedding cake. This idea was derived from the format of *Batonka* stools to be found in Halsted-Berning's house and a *Yoruba* carving seen in an *African Arts* journal (Figure 14f) Halsted-Berning used these objects to demonstrate to Ntshalintshali how height could be obtained. The work was also not limited by the size of the kiln and further, it could be dissembled to facilitate packing and transporting to exhibitions and collectors. Implicitly, Ntshalintshali's large, complex works that resulted from this mode of construction were inevitably able to be priced higher.

*Adam* and *Eve* (Figures 14a and 14b) from 1990, discussed later in this chapter, demonstrates this stacked building method. Ntshalintshali's construction method adapted and changed according to the demands of building larger sculptures. Instead of modelling and pinching out small figures which were then joined together to form a larger composition, she began to coil a cylinder or rectangular base onto which her small figures were applied. She could also coil hollow or model solid figures to place on top. This application of small modelled figures to a

coiled form possibly inspired the rest of the artists at the studio to apply animals and floral motifs to their coiled vessels.

In order to read Ntshalintshali's work with a full understanding of her iconography one needs to examine her work in the context of her background as well as establish the sources which inform her work. Ntshalintshali's work originates from a multitude of sources derived directly from her Zulu background, her Christian-based schooling and faith, and material she has gleaned from Halsted-Berning. Ntshalintshali has absorbed some elements and subconsciously rejected others. Thus her work reveals a selective and often subconscious process of appropriation. Halsted-Berning can be identified as forging an initial ethnic identity in Ntshalintshali's work. It is significant to re-iterate that Halsted-Berning enjoyed what she felt was a naive and uncontrived expression in Ntshalintshali's work. To stimulate Ntshalintshali's imagination, Halsted-Berning brought her books and magazines of African animals, ethnic prints and other examples of African and European art. Much of her imagery is therefore derived from pictures. She reinterprets the image in terms of her personal idiom and aesthetic which distinguishes it from the source of origin. She also adds elements that are reflective of her background which identifies her cultural and ethnic heritage.

Since her cultural background seems to have an important thematic bearing on her work, one needs to consider it in some detail. However, the concept of ethnicity, as discussed in the Introduction, has become a contentious issue among South African art historians:

"there has been a tendency to see ethnicity as an invention of apartheid, researchers have become increasingly cautious in their use of terminology and have consequently been forced to look carefully at different ways in which ethnic identities have been shaped by government officials and missionaries on the one hand, or mobilised through the convergence of patriarchal interests on the other" (Klopper 1992:11).

Klopper (1992:11) goes on to say that 'ethnicity' is not a natural cultural residue but a consciously crafted one.

Further, Zulu ethnicity is partly inherited from Nguni forebears and is, according to Klopper (1992:11), partly a politically-based fabrication resulting from apartheid. Klopper later (1992:169-212) examines how Inkatha was largely responsible for shaping and building a 'Zulu culture'. The preservation of their identity became the key to the survival of the Zulu nation. A 'Zulu identity' was promoted by encouraging traditional dress to be worn with the precedent being set by the king and by chiefs. With the introduction of Christianity to KwaZulu-Natal in the 1820s, the original symbolism of the costumes was all but lost, nevertheless Inkatha used the opportunity of this Zulu dress tradition as one means of unifying the Zulu-speaking peoples.

However enigmatic the concept of ethnicity is, Ntshalintshali's work is inevitably related to her contemporary cultural identity, as a Zulu speaker. Since cultures are constantly changing, and ethnicity is continually being moulded by circumstance, the implications and definitions of what characterises twentieth century Zulu culture would need to be established.

Although Ntshalintshali is Catholic, her family practices animism and polygamy. Despite the fact that her father has three wives, she claims that the entire family is Catholic and regularly attends mass on Sundays.<sup>7</sup> Her Christian faith was largely nurtured at school in both her primary and secondary years which were administered by the Roman Catholic Church. When she was in standard four she took her First Communion through the school.<sup>8</sup>

Historically black education in South Africa, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal, has been largely Christian-based. Apartheid Bantu Education policies were based on the aims of the early missionaries who stressed the importance of Christianity in the education system in order to introduce western work ethics and morality. In addition, emphasis was placed on teaching artisanal skills in schools as an important basis or foundation for a new economic life and outlook. Government Departments officially adopted a Christian foundation for education in order to maintain control in the future development in schools (Grossert 1968:8-9).

Ntshalintshali's schooling is comparatively advanced since many inhabitants in the area receive only a basic primary school education. Due to her physical disability, her parents may have

decided to leave her at school perhaps in the hopes of her becoming more employable. Her disability was certainly a contributing factor to her being sent to work with Halsted-Berning in the studio since it was felt by her mother that farm labour was too strenuous for her daughter.<sup>9</sup>

Ntshalintshali's cultural identity was thus forged from diverse sources which in turn, have manifested themselves in the pictorial imagery of her work. While her work is informed by her cultural and Christian background, a more overt Afro-ethnicity was introduced by Halsted-Berning. Two main sub-themes become evident in her work. Each expresses a different part of her ethnic identity. On the one hand she explores her so-called Zulu background, and on the other, she contemplates her western-based background. Examples of each sub-theme will be discussed below. Her imagery is drawn from symbols from biblical narratives, animist rituals and western consumerism. Although the combination of these sources seem to be conflicting, they represent a contemporary dimension of cross-cultural experience.

Evidence of a sense of multiculturalism in her work noticeably appeared prior to the work for the Standard Bank Artists Award. From making animal forms, Ntshalintshali attempted biblical themes depicting the stories she had heard in her youth. She also created pictorial narratives from the biblical stories she read.<sup>10</sup> Her reinterpretation of biblical figures, historically depicted as caucasian, were depicted as black persons like herself. This was not unknown in South African art. The assimilating or 'africanising' of themes had its roots in KwaZulu-Natal particularly in the 1950s when Sister Maria Pientia tried to integrate African art personages into Church Art. She encouraged her students at Mariannhill to retain their cultural identity and combine it with Christian morality (Pettersen 1992:56-58). Vogel (1991:9) refers to this as 'the Africanising of Christianity'.

As Ntshalintshali's work has matured, she has in many instances depicted holy figures as black despite the fact that she had observed prototype images of white holy figures in European paintings. However, closer inspection of her work and discussion with her, has revealed that not all the figures she depicts are necessarily black. She makes a conscious decision at the outset of a project as to whether the figures will be black or white, based on her perceptions of

the narrative and its didactic or moral implications. For example, in the sculpture entitled *The Last Judgement* (1994)(Figure 18) discussed later, the image of God is not only depicted as black but Zulu, in order to appeal to the Zulus to end the violence in KwaZulu-Natal. Ntshalintshali's decision to depict God as Zulu suggests her belief that God is universal.

The Tatham Art Gallery's *Noah's Ark* (1989), depicted in Figure 12, retains the strong biblical narrative, but compositionally relates to her earlier candlestick holders. The piece comprises pairs of animals stacked up one on top of another to attain height. This vertical dimension is almost doubled by the inclusion of an arc painted to resemble a rainbow, symbolising God's promise to his people and animals. Mounted at the apex above the animals is Noah with his arms outstretched as if embracing the new world as the floodwaters subside.

It is interesting to note that the animals which appear in pairs, are all African which re-enforces the indiginity of her work. The deliberate use of African imagery in a biblical tale such as Noah's Ark is also due to the direct intervention by Halsted-Berning. Halsted-Berning believes that artists in South Africa should assert their identities by acknowledging African sources and indigenous imagery rather than seeking inspiration from foreign sources.<sup>11</sup> She has therefore encouraged Ntshalintshali and the rest of the Ardmore studio (with the exception of Ghesa) to use indigenous-based material as stimulation. Ironically, much of this so-called indigenous material (eg elephants, lions, crocodiles, leopards) is as 'foreign' to Ntshalintshali and her colleagues as grizzly bears, deer or kangaroos since Ntshalintshali has never seen the game that she depicts.

The work for the Standard Bank Young Artists Award in 1990 consisted of two bodies of work, that of Halsted-Berning and that of Ntshalintshali. Although they worked in close association with one another, each explored different themes. As noted previously that although their work was very different, they depended on each other for inspiration and stimulation. Halsted-Berning explored, in a fairly facetious manner, her life as a privileged white expatriate, her life on the farm with her husband and her experiences of motherhood in a series of clay plaques. Ntshalintshali, on the other hand, explored biblical stories using her own

metaphors to place them in a more contemporary, regional context. Common to both artists is the tendency to draw from personal experience. A discussion of five biblical works, four of which were made for the Standard Bank Young Artist Award, proceeds, and highlights some of the dimensions addressed above.

*The Last Supper* (1990)(Figure 13) shows a table setting with twelve disciples and Christ standing around it. They are clothed in long classical biblical garments as occur in illustrated bibles. While her depiction of Christ is as a caucasian, Ntshalintshali has chosen to depict some of the disciples as black, implying that everyone, no matter their skin colour, can share at the table of God.<sup>12</sup>

The composition of the piece parallels the compositions used by artists of the past, especially echoing Leonardo da Vinci's famous version of the *Last Supper*. Christ is placed at the centre of the table with outstretched arms. The disciples cluster around him in four groups of three. Judas, on Christ's right hand side clenches his bag of gold and scowls at the other disciples while they gasp with horror at the mention of Christ's immanent betrayal. Thus it becomes evident that careful attention is made to include both factual details as related in the Bible.

On the table a sumptuous selection of food, indicative of a feast, including some traditional Zulu foods such as a goat's head, sour porridge, and *phutu*, as well as many contemporary western foods and beverages including bottles of Coca Cola and Castle beer. Some of the food is served on a wooden *uggoko* or Zulu meat-platter.

The winged creatures that surround the base of the sculpture were derived from images that she had seen from a book in the studio entitled *Gothic Art*.<sup>13</sup> The gargoyles and winged creatures that she saw stimulated her to incorporate some of the figures into her sculpture of *The Last Supper*. She says that these figures thus have no apparent symbolic significance but are included merely as objects of interest.<sup>14</sup> However these creatures may also have subconscious associations with angels or demons.



The two sculptures of *Adam* and *Eve* (1990)(Figure 14a and 14b) are linked to the narrative of the Garden of Eden and the Temptation. Although the works were made separately, they have virtually identical compositions and read well as a pair. The sculptures are each approximately one and a half metres in height and comprise three main tiers. The height was obtained by using the tiers to divide the sculpture into small sections, which were stacked and glued at a later stage. The tiered vertical composition was derived from a photograph of a *Yoruba* sculpture (Figure 14f) which Halsted and Ntshalintshali saw in a copy of *African Arts*.

The first tier is a tall circular plinth built using the coil method of construction. Eve's plinth (Figure 14g and 14h) is decorated with a combination of indigenous and exotic animals such as peacocks, tigers, leopards, zebras, baboons and eland interspersed with palms. A serpent is entwined in each palm. A smaller, connecting plinth joins the figure of Eve to the base plinth. The smaller plinth has large leaves around which another green snake entwines itself.

The first plinth of Adam (Figure 14e), also a circular drum, is decorated with discs and zigzags below an image of the tree of life. In the trees are numerous venomous serpents. A smaller plinth forms the connection between the base plinth is largely decorated with large fig leaves.

A nude Eve (Figure 14a) forms the second tier and in her hands she holds an apple - the fruit of temptation. Adam (Figure 14b) stands in a frontal position with his hands folded across his chest. The third tier forms a headdress where a column extends vertically from the top of Eve's head (Figure 14c). It is decorated with pink flowers and birds depicting the beauty of the creation. The head of a green cobra forms the pinnacle of the sculpture. Ntshalintshali has selectively chosen to focus on particular motifs in the above mentioned sculptures. She includes the snake motif repeatedly in *Adam*, and the apple and the snake are also focal points in *Eve*. These appear to emphasise the moment of temptation and intervention by implicit evil in the idyllic context of Eden. The latter is suggested by the inclusion of animals, flowers and birds on the sculptures' bases and symbolise the garden.

While the figure of Adam is painted dark brown to resemble a black person, the figure of Eve is left unpainted and is therefore lighter in colour than Adam. Ntshalintshali says she made the figures different to show that God made all people different (Crowe 1996:140).

The sculpture of *Jonah and the Whale* (1990)(Figure 15a) was based on a stained glass image (Figure 15c) that Ntshalintshali saw in *Mysteries from the Bible*. Ntshalintshali reinterpreted this two-dimensional image into her own three-dimensional version of the incident between Jonah and the whale. The composition depicts the figure of Jonah praising God as he exits the jaws of the whale. Although the original stained glass version portrays a fish, Ntshalintshali chooses a more conventional reading, taken from her Bible, by depicting a whale. The whale has been painted grey but attention is nevertheless drawn to the markings and ripples on his skin by careful modelling of the clay. In contrast to the plain grey body of the whale, Jonah's clothes are highly decorated. The sculpture appears to have strong metaphoric readings of redemption and renewal. This sculpture, one of her works that was transcribed into a serigraph, will be discussed later in this chapter.

*The Nativity* (1989)(Figure 16) relates the story of Christ's coming. The sculpture is divided into four tiers. The first tier depicts the Annunciation with Mary kneeling before the Angel Gabriel (Figure 16b). Verster (1990), compares the composition of Ntshalintshali's Annunciation to a fresco painted in 1440-1445 by Fra Angelico (Figure 16a) that Ntshalintshali had seen in a book in the studio.

The second tier relates the story of the shepherds hearing the news of the birth of Jesus. The third tier depicts the three magi on their camels following the star to the place of Jesus's birth. The Mother and Child forms the apex of the sculpture, thereby completing a rather conventional treatment of the narrative.

*The Resurrection* (1990)(Figure 17) parallels the composition of *The Nativity* (Figure 16) in its verticality, scale and use of tiers. *The Resurrection* was made to replace *The Nativity* which was partially destroyed in a fire at the 1820 Foundation in Grahamstown in 1994.

*The Resurrection* narrates the series of events that were central to Christ's crucifixion. Ironically, although the work is titled *The Resurrection*, she depicts only the Kiss of Judas, the Pieta and Ascension. The base (Figure 17a) forms a circular plinth and has relief images of the cross, crowing roosters, cherubs descending from heaven, gold stars, and singing faces of angels interspersed with patterns. All these motifs appear symbolically relevant to the theme of the sculpture: the singing angels joyously sing of Christ's resurrection, the crowing rooster signifies Peter's denial, the gold stars are reminiscent of those seen in *The Nativity* that led the magi to the Baby Jesus.

The first tier depicts the Kiss of Judas (Figure 17a) and depicts the embrace of Christ and Judas. To the left stands the cock, crowing as the dawn breaks while Peter (not included in the composition) implicitly denies his association with Jesus. Behind the standing figures of Judas and Jesus is a panel built to support the above tier. The panel is decorated with a tree of life on the front with the imagery from the base repeated around the rear side (Figure 17b). To a large extent Ntshalintshali relies on the viewer's knowledge of the related incidents to complete and interpret the narrative.

The Pieta or Deposition (Figures 17c & 17d) is portrayed in the second tier. The lifeless Christ, with blood dripping from wounds in his hands, feet and torso lies in Mary's arms. Mary is dressed in blue and white - the colours traditionally associated with her while Christ is covered in a white loin cloth.

The top tier is again the apex of the sculpture and depicts the Ascension (Figures 17e & 17f). Christ supported by an angel who seems to be carrying him heavenward and is accompanied by a further two angels at his feet.

Ntshalintshali adheres to symbols such as the white loin cloth draped around Christ, blue garment to indicate Mary, and the cross in reference to the crucifixion, all of which have strong associations in Catholicism. It is probable that Ntshalintshali (in conjunction with Halsted-Berning) designed this sculpture, as they did the Nativity, from observations made from

Halsted-Berning's books. This collaboration, as in this instance, is often a positive dimension in the partnership between Halsted-Berning and Ntshalintshali, as formal and iconographic elements are discussed at the inception of the work.

*The Last Judgement* (Figure 18) was made for the Aperto exhibition at the 1993 Venice Biennale. Ntshalintshali was one of eight South African artists to exhibit on this show. It was the first time in twenty-five years that South Africa was invited to exhibit following the lifting of cultural sanctions during the waning of apartheid rule.

The piece comprises four cylindrical tiers. The bottom tier forms the base and has winged goat-like creatures, and fictional birds and crocodiles, interspersed with flowers, attached to its surface. The combination of the delicate flowers and the strange beasts suggests a threatening ambience associated with impending doom. Alternate vertical rows of skulls and zigzag patterns are modelled onto the surface of the plinth. The third tier comprises a group of dead indigenous animals built around a tall cylindrical plinth. These animals, as with the animals in the first plinth, are modelled and painted in the finest detail with every mark of their pelts described by minute brush-marks.

The fourth tier depicts the image of an angry God. His hand is raised and he points his finger as if in warning and admonition. God is depicted as a Zulu king or chieftain, dressed in leopard skin regalia. Klopper (1991:212) states that leopard skin garments were often worn by important councillors and praise singers as well as by the king himself. Leopard skin (and also elephant skin) were important symbols of the king's strength and power parallel with the power of the animals (Kennedy 1993:139).<sup>15</sup>

The figure of God that Ntshalintshali has represented is derived from her imagination. She relates the authority and supremacy of God to her own context where the chief holds this position of leadership. In an interview, she disclosed the reason for depicting God as a Zulu Chief. She felt that by depicting God as Zulu, she was indicating that God speaks to the Black people as he does to anyone else. The sculpture holds a certain moral, didactic element in that,

according to Ntshalintshali, God is warning black people that the time of fighting and violence has expired and peace in South Africa is long overdue. He warns that he will be angered by the continued fighting, which will lead to the death of many of God's creatures. Thus Ntshalintshali felt that, in the light of the conflict experienced currently in KwaZulu-Natal, her message for peace would be brought across more succinctly by portraying God as black.<sup>16</sup>

After she had explored the biblical sub-theme in some depth in the work for the Standard Bank Young Artists Award, she made a series of sculptures that explored Zulu ritual and myth. These themes were explored through the depiction of a number so-called 'traditionalist customs' particularly marriage. Ntshalintshali's depictions are largely based on her attendance of her sister's marriages.

*Lobola* or *Zulu Wedding* (1990 South African National Gallery; Cape Town) (Figure 19), exhibited on the 1991 Cape Town Triennial, shows the bride and groom standing on a square platform. Dressed in traditional Zulu marriage garments (Figure 19a) the bride wears a cowhide or black felt skirt called an *isidwaba* adorned with beadwork, and the groom wears a leopard skin skirt. Both are wearing the customary headdresses (Kennedy 1993:118 and 121). The bride holds in her hand a knife which, according to Reader (1966:199), she will point at the groom to indicate to him that she is a virgin. Ntshalintshali, however, did not know what the knife was used for or what it symbolised but said that all brides carried a knife.<sup>17</sup> Next to the groom stands a cow and next to the bride is the wedding goat adorned with blankets and trimmings. The goat and cow are the *isikhumba* and *yokuxola* beasts and are for sacrificial purposes (Reader 1966:205-206). This goat, which is adorned by the bride's family, accompanies the bride and is traditionally used for presents to be placed on or around it.

Behind the couple (Figure 19b) are a number of people, also clothed in traditional dress, who are apparently singing and dancing. Two chickens are included in the sculpture as is a cat and another unidentified animal. According to the artist these are incidental to the story and derived from her observations.<sup>18</sup>

The platform is supported and raised by a four-sided rectangular column. On two sides of the column sleeping mats and blankets (Figures 19b & 19c), which are presents from the bride to her in-laws, are stacked. According to Reader (1966:207) it is important for the bride to bring gifts for her new relatives, both the living and the dead in order for her to gain acceptance into her prospective family. On the third side (Figure 19c) two women, each dressed in an *isidwaba* and with leopard skin 't-shirts', are brewing beer (*utshwala*) in a large black pot. It is interesting to note that the *utshwala* is being brewed in what appears to be a cast iron pot, and not the traditionally used *imbiza* made from clay. The *utshwala* is served in *izinkhamba* (beer-drinking vessels), two of which are seen at the feet of the women. On the fourth side of the column (Figure 19b) are two warriors who have, according to Ntshalintshali, come to join in the wedding celebrations.

The column is decorated with chevrons and diamond shaped patterns. This particular design was stimulated by Zulu beadwork. Although Ntshalintshali has indicated that she does not own any beadwork herself, she has seen it in the neighbouring Loskop Township and admires the bold patterns and bright colours.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to depictions of Zulu rituals, she has also portrayed cross-cultural aspects in a number of her sculptures. This is exemplified specifically in the four works (*Wedding*, 1988; *Lobola*, 1988; *Tea Party*, 1993; *Farmer Visits Sangoma*, 1994) discussed below, two of which are related to the marriage ritual discussed above. While her one sister was married under Zulu customary law, another sister preferred a westernised, Christian wedding ceremony.<sup>20</sup> This is indicative of western and traditional amalgamation in her own household.

*Wedding* (1988) comprises individual figures of the bride and groom, accompanied by the groomsmen and bridesmaid. The bride wears a white wedding dress while her bridesmaid is dressed in a matching dress. The groom and groomsmen are dressed in suits. All the figures have been modelled from solid clay and have then been decorated with Plaka paint. Reminiscent of the Zulu marriage ceremony is the inclusion of a goat, in this sculpture splendidly decorated in blankets and trimmings. According to Reader (1966:214-221) this

would have been typical of a Christian wedding ceremony where the participants wear western clothing but still observe some past animist rituals.

*Lobola* (1988)(Figure 20) depicts the bride, dressed again in a white wedding dress, and her parents also dressed in western clothing, in the midst of a pyramid of cattle. The pyramid of cattle is constructed in much the same manner as her earlier candlestick holders where the animals are stacked one on top of the other giving the sculpture height. These cattle represent the *lobola* and are payment to the brides parents to compensate for the loss of their daughter. Although the bride and parents are dressed in western bridal regalia, the *lobola* ritual is still observed.

The bride takes a basket of flowers to her in-laws as a gift. Also present in the sculpture, scattered among the cows are chickens. As with *Zulu Wedding* (1990)(Figure 19) these, to Ntshalintshali, are seen as merely incidental<sup>21</sup> but in reality they are part of the rural context and represent an important part of sustenance to the inhabitants of the area.

The *Tea Party* (1993 Cultural History Museum Collection; Cape Town)(Figure 22) comprises four individual rectangular pieces of a Zulu-speaking man and woman drinking tea. The sculpture depicts a husband and wife, a tea tray with an Ardmore tea set and another tray of tea and coffee condiments. The tea set and condiments become visually as important as the figures, since each is given equal emphasis by being placed on a base which has the same dimensions, and is decorated in the same way as the next.

This sculpture depicts the combining of a western tea ritual with a traditional beer ritual where the couple have elected to drink tea together instead of the more traditional practice where the wife would have served her husband beer out of an *isikhamba*. Instead of offering beer in an *isikhamba*, she presents her husband with tea and coffee out of a typical Ardmore tea-set. The tea-set is decorated with an imitation zebra skin influenced by the studio work which, as noted previously, often includes textures from the pelts of African animals. The zebra pattern was used frequently on earlier Ardmore pieces as a means of decoration.

The woman (Figure 22) is dressed in traditional dress wearing an *isidwaba*, traditional Zulu headdress and a leopard skin 't-shirt'. Klopper (1991:219) contends that imitation leopard prints are often worn, usually by men as a symbol of virility and strength and denote a sense of Zuluness. Such imitations are commonly worn as presently the genuine article is too costly and is only rarely used in official contexts. The use of imitation prints is, according to Klopper, "part of an ongoing redefinition of social and political relations through appeals to an uncertain, even mythical past" (Klopper 1991:219). The leopard skin pattern is repeated in the man's garments (Figure 22). He wears a leopard skin head ring and loin cloth. In contrast to his more traditional garments, he wears a red and black stripe rugby jersey and white 'takkies'.

In choosing to represent the figures dressed thus, she explores the complex cross-cultural dimensions of identity in twentieth century KwaZulu-Natal.

The sculpture of the *Farmer Visiting the Sangoma*, from 1994, (Figure 23) differs from the sculpture of the *Tea Party* in that it depicts whites accepting aspects of black culture thereby representing cross-cultural exchange from another perspective. It portrays three figures, a white man who is apparently a farmer kneeling before the second figure, a *sangoma* seated outside her beehive hut. The third figure, a boy, assists the *sangoma* by beating drums, encouraging communication between the *sangoma* and the ancestral shades. There are two *isikhamba* outside the hut. According to Ntshalintshali, the farmer was suffering a sterility problem and came to the *sangoma* for advice. The *sangoma* stoops over her bones in consultation with the ancestral shades.

Ntshalintshali has made use of stereotypes in order to convey her narrative. The farmer is dressed stereotypically as a KwaZulu-Natal Midlands farmer in a checkered shirt and hat. The *sangoma*, dressed in a manner which identifies her profession, wears an *isidwaba*, leopard print 't-shirt', beads in her hair, and leopard skin bands around her arms and ankles. In her hand she holds a *sangoma's* switch.



The entire composition is placed on a circular plinth which was built using the coil method of construction. The plinth is decorated with a sprigged tree bearing yellow peaches. According to Ntshalintshali, peach trees often grow around Zulu homesteads. The tree could possibly represent the Tree of Life and therefore adding an amusing element of irony between fertility and sterility to the work.

The fruits of her successes have been very much enjoyed by her and her family. She made a series of sculptures that concerned her own life to celebrate her recent accomplishments.

*Toyota* (1991) (Figure 24), is a sculpture of the blue 'bakkie' that Ntshalintshali brought for her brother after Ntshalintshali won the Standard Bank Young Artists Award, and depicts some aspects of the material prosperity as a result of her success. On the back of the 'bakkie' are two miniature replicas of her sculptures of *Adam and Eve*. As has become characteristic of her work, the 'bakkie' is placed on a square base which raised by a smaller square plinth and decorated with flowers. Also included are two models of sculptures that were made for the Standard Bank Young Artists Award. These are placed on either side of the 'bakkie'. The one depicts *David and Goliath* while the other depicts *Jonah and the Whale*.

In 1993 Ntshalintshali gave birth to her first child. This prompted new developments in the content of her work such as depictions of aspects motherhood. There are only two works from this period (1994), and both are a celebration of motherhood but each is inspired by a different source. The first appears to be a twentieth century *Madonna and Child* (Figure 25) inspired by images that Ntshalintshali had seen over the years at school, in the Bible and from various art books. The mother, is seated on a throne with her child seated on her lap. She is wearing a contemporary pink floral dress. Both the child and mother have halos on their heads denoting their divinity. The throne is encircled by birds, who, according to the artist are singing to Baby Jesus. Two genets appears on either side of the throne. They, like the birds, have come to pay homage to the newborn. Ntshalintshali included genets specifically since she notes that she appreciates the colour and considered the skin pattern as complementary to the decorative qualities evident in the work.

The throne is elevated by a small black plinth-like base. It is decorated with a row of paisley motifs that are modelled in relief. In addition there are two rows of flowers adorning the base. In celebration of Christ's birth, Ntshalintshali imagined that nature released an abundance of beauty and harmony, as depicted by the flowers.<sup>22</sup>

The second sculpture, *Mother and Child* (1993)(Figure 26), includes two pieces. The first is a depiction of a mother (possibly herself) breast-feeding her child. The baby is wrapped in a blanket while she is dressed in a pale floral shirt and navy blue skirt and is seated on a rectangular plinth similar to the plinths used in the sculpture of the *Tea Party* (Figure 22). The plinth, in a sense, has become an elaborate ornamental element of the sculpture with the intense decoration almost overpowering the sculpture. Nevertheless the use of the plinth in this sculpture, as in all her sculptures, becomes an integral part of the composition since it functions in this work as a seat for the mother, a table for the bottles, milk formula and baby porridge. The base therefore serves to elevate and give the sculpture more presence. The detailed decoration on the base is a way of covering a plain and otherwise bland surface. Personally she says she enjoys intense decoration accompanied by the use of bright colours. This is often demonstrated in her preference for highly patterned clothing and the bright, bold colours that she often wears.<sup>23</sup>

Ntshalintshali seldom makes self-portraits since she prefers not to make images of herself. *Self Portrait* from 1990 (Figure 21) is an exception and depicts Ntshalintshali as one would see her in a everyday situation - seated at her workbench with one of her sculptures placed in front of her. It seems appropriate that the sculpture that she depicts in front of her, is a stacked animal sculpture, which, according to the artist<sup>24</sup>, is the most enjoyable to make.<sup>25</sup>

While Ntshalintshali worked quietly at the studio her friends used to visit her to admire her work. As previously mentioned, Halsted-Berning invited her friends as newcomers into the studio to work. She introduced a new line of work to as she did not want them to copy Ntshalintshali's work. She felt that their work was not of the same quality nor did it have the

narrative expression that was typical of Ntshalintshali's work. Instead, the copies looked like "badly-made-Bonnies".<sup>26</sup>

Ironically, although Halsted-Berning in a sense protected the exclusivity of Ntshalintshali's work by introducing a new line of work for her colleagues to pursue, Ntshalintshali started in about 1993 to make work in response to that produced by the rest of the studio. Instead of building sculptures in red clay, she opted to make functional work in white clay in keeping with her colleagues. Because these pieces were functional, they were painted in commercial underglaze pigments then glazed in a transparent earthenware glaze. Ntshalintshali therefore had to adapt her skills for painting in acrylic paint to underglaze painting.

At first, since Ntshalintshali was competent at both handbuilding and painting, she would coil, model and paint her own pieces. When pressed for time she would team up with her sister, Beauty Ntshalintshali, a particularly good handbuilder. Recently she has decided to only paint on pieces made by other people. Because of her status in the studio she is afforded the privilege of getting first choice of handbuilt pieces.<sup>27</sup> Consequently she usually gets the best pieces to decorate.

Ntshalintshali's painting technique on functional pieces is characterised by a precise and scrupulous sensitivity. This is rendered in the sumptuous, even spread of underglaze colour which gives a brilliance to the images that she paints. Her work is enhanced by fine, carefully controlled brush-marks which serve to fill in the detail and activate the surface quality of her work.

Much of this work can be identified by a strong floral component. Seen in many of her sculptures (such as the *Madonna and Child* (Figure 25), *Eve* (Figure 14a) and *The Resurrection* (Figure 17)) are the inclusion of small delicate flowers modelled on to the surface of the form. These have been transcribed and incorporated in the decoration of large, flat surfaces of her functional pieces. More specifically these flowers are usually painted in pinks, offset by blues, greens and black as seen in Figure 27 of *Teapot with Birds*. Ntshalintshali has

used predominantly pink on the lid handle and spout. The pink is contrasted by the inclusion of green and is offset by small yellow and blue flower and leaf motifs. She seems to favour pansy-type flowers, blue-bells and similar stylised flowers. Figure 3 of *Vase with Tigers and Deer* (discussed previously in text) from 1994 further exemplifies flowers which are often seen in her functional ware.

Figure 28 shows Ntshalintshali decorating a handbuilt bowl. Although unfinished, it is typical of her work. She modelled flowers onto the rim of the bowl and has continued the flower motif in the painting of the bowl. Similarly the lions modelled onto the handles of the bowl are repeated in a motif in the inside of the bowl. Ntshalintshali has painted two borders of more fantastical flower motifs on the interior of the bowl. These motifs are often seen in her work in varying combinations and slight variations.

In addition to the floral motifs, there are other motifs and patterns that she uses. These she says are inspired by designs that she sees from everyday life, while shopping, on her friend's dresses, and from magazines. When she sees something that appeals to her she either makes a mental note or does a quick sketch.<sup>28</sup> These are then incorporated into her work.

Her functional ware has been well received and is constantly in demand, fetching high prices (Appendix 6). This has possibly prompted her to continue this line as a viable way to maintain a steady income.<sup>29</sup> Because her work is in such demand, it often sells before the works can be photographically documented and thus records of her works are limited.

In the studio Ntshalintshali is somewhat of a role model for other members of the studio to aspire to and from whom standards are measured. Her colleagues seem to often take their inspiration directly from her work. This in a sense may have reinforced the tendency of the more experienced painters to move towards a greater degree of naturalism. Halsted-Berning maintains that Ntshalintshali's work, which is a refined form of Ardmore functional ware, has led to a refinement in handbuilding and painting in the studio.<sup>30</sup>

A new medium was introduced to Ntshalintshali in 1990/1991 when she was commissioned by The Standard Bank, as one of the Young Artist Award Winners, along with all the other previous winners, to produce three prints at Caversham Press for an exhibition entitled *A Decade of Young Artists*. All her silkscreen images originated from her three dimensional work from pieces exhibited in the Standard Bank Young Artist's Award Exhibition. Halsted-Berning suggested to her that since she had never worked in this medium, and had little experience in handling a two-dimensional surface<sup>31</sup>, working from a sculpture she had already made would be less foreign and intimidating to her. Under the guidance of master printer, Malcolm Christian, she produced three serigraphs. *Joseph, Elijah* and *Jonah and the Whale*.

The image of *Jonah and the Whale* (Figure 16c) comprises a linear drawing of the whale which almost fills the format of the page. But for the underside of the whale and the small figure of Jonah emerging from the whale's mouth, which are intensely decorated with bright patterns, the page is left almost untouched.

In 1995 Christian came to Ardmore to assist and direct Ntshalintshali and some of the other studio members with prints. Ntshalintshali chose to draw an image of *Daniel and the Lions* (Figure 29). Again the idea for the work was taken from her sculpture of the same subject. There is a strong decorative element displayed in a floral garment worn by Daniel which is contrasted by the large flat area of colour.

Ntshalintshali can be identified as one of only a few black woman artists in South Africa. Not only has she had numerous awards bestowed on her for her sculptural work, but she has shown versatility in learning new techniques in painting with underglaze and drawing serigraph images. Together with Halsted-Berning, Ntshalintshali has contributed significantly to the acceptance of new media in South African ceramics. In addition, her unique interpretations of various themes has resulted in compelling, often didactic, narrative sculptures related to socio-political issues and comments on local social interaction and identity. She has developed a refined decorative idiom characterised by a meticulous surface decoration of fauna and flora

and abstract shapes. As one of the founding members of the studio, she has acquired considerable status and is an inspiration to her colleagues.

## ENDNOTES

1. Ntshalintshali's family have lived for many years on the Ardmore Farm. Her mother, Janet Ntshalintshali, has worked for the Bernings as a domestic while her father worked on the farm as a labourer.
2. Personal interview conducted with Ntshalintshali in 1994.
3. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1995.
4. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1994.
5. Graburn, however, distinguishes curio art as often having some use or function, since the makers/artists on which Graburn (1976:15) based his theory maintain that objects that have a defined purpose sell more readily. Implicit, therefore, in the functionality of Ntshalintshali's work, is an ironic commonality with such curio art.
6. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1994.
7. She has noted that although she is Roman Catholic she would still consult a *sangoma*, indicating that elements of Zulu traditionalism are still a very important part of her lifestyle. (Personal interview conducted with Ntshalintshali in 1995).
8. Personal interview conducted with Ntshalintshali in 1995.
9. Personal interview with Janet Ntshalintshali in 1995.
10. Personal interview conducted with Ntshalintshali in 1995.
11. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in August 1994.
12. Personal interview conducted with Ntshalintshali in September 1995.
13. By Andrew Martindale 1967 *The World of Art Library* History of Art London: Thames and Hudson.
14. Personal interview with Ntshalintshali conducted in September 1995.
15. Klopper (1991:212) contends that leopard skin was not traditionally worn regalia. The wearing of leopard skin came about with a Shaka revival largely initiated by Inkatha as a show of strength among the Zulu nation. Earlier in the century King Cyprian and King Solomon wore leopard skin trimmings

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on their uniforms. Thus a convention of leopard skin being associated with Zulu royalty developed. This was embellished upon by Hollywood style portraiture of Zulu kings and chiefs dressed in leopard skin garments (Klopper 1991: 212-219). Ntshalintshali may have become aware of the contemporary use of the leopard skin either in the media, by Halsted Berning's notion of the pelt's African associations, or by its frequent usage by Inkatha members at rallies and political meetings. She is certainly aware of the use of imitation leopard skin cloth and clothing which she depicts in some of her sculptures such as *Tea Party*.

16. Personal interview conducted with Ntshalintshali in September 1995.
17. Personal interview conducted with Ntshalintshali in September 1995.
18. Personal interview conducted with Ntshalintshali in September 1995.
19. Personal interview conducted with Ntshalintshali in September 1995.
20. Personal interview conducted with Ntshalintshali in September 1995.
21. Personal interview conducted with Ntshalintshali in September 1995.
22. Personal interview conducted with Ntshalintshali in September 1995.
23. Personal interview conducted with Ntshalintshali in September 1995.
24. Personal interview conducted with Ntshalintshali in September 1995.
25. Ntshalintshali maintains that she enjoys sculpting and decorating animals since she appreciates their bright colours and varied skin patterns.
26. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1994.
27. Personal interview conducted with Ntshalintshali in September 1995.
28. Personal interview conducted with Ntshalintshali in September 1995.
29. However, Halsted-Berning has recently become concerned that Ntshalintshali will be absorbed into the studio and is encouraging her to rather make sculptures (March 1996).
30. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in June 1995.



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31. In a personal interview with Garrett in February 1997, he revealed how the Ardmore artists, including Ntshalintshali had an aversion to working on paper. It is interesting to note that the painter will willingly tackle a flat white ceramic surface with underglaze paint but not a clean sheet of paper with coloured pencils and paint. Perhaps this medium has negative associations with school.

# CHAPTER THREE

## CONTEXTUALISING THE WORK OF JOSEPHINE GHESA

Josephine Ghesa was born in Lesotho in a small village outside Thabazeka, and while the date of her birth is unknown, she is probably between 35 and 45 years of age. She was orphaned as a child and was sent to live with her grandparents and received no formal schooling. Her grandmother worked as a potter making vessels and Ghesa first learnt to work with clay from her. Ghesa apparently made and sold pots in Maseru.<sup>1</sup>

In 1990 Ghesa arrived at the Ardmore Farm looking for employment as a farm labourer. Since there was no assistance required at the time, it was suggested that she work in the studio with Fée Halsted-Berning. When she arrived at Ardmore, it was five years after the studio's inception, and the year that Halsted-Berning and Ntshalintshali won the Standard Bank Young Artists Award. At this time Halsted-Berning was heavily involved in the studio. Besides making her own work and working with Ntshalintshali, she devoted much energy and attention to newcomers like Ghesa.

Little is recalled about the early development of her work, but from her arrival, she apparently showed an aptitude for sculpture. She was channelled into making figurative sculpture in terracotta clay. These sculptures, as are most of her large sculptures, are handbuilt using the coil method of construction. Ghesa's work has evolved a distinctive style that is characterised by its monumentality and the incidence of lumpy, crude, marks from both tools and fingers. More recently, she has become preoccupied with enhancing the surface by adding or modelling textures on and into the forms. This is exemplified in nodule-like formations on the crocodile from *Crocodile with Angels* (1995)(Figure 40) and the 'fur' on the figure in *Angel with Owls* (1995)(Figure 45).

Limited photographic records show that Ghesa's first few works closely resembled the work produced by the rest of the studio. It was largely functional as seen in Figure 30 of a set clothes' hooks (1990) where each hook takes the form of a zoomorphic or anthropomorphic head. At present this type of hook is frequently made by other members of the studio. Figures 30 and 31 (1990) demonstrate works that were modelled by Ghesa, then painted by another member of the studio with brightly coloured Plaka paints in the decorative fashion characteristic of the 'Ardmore style'. While studio artists mainly use underglaze pigments, they are sometimes called to assist in decorating ware in Plaka paint.

Halsted-Berning, who recognized Ghesa's affinity for sculpture, encouraged her to pursue her own interests and style. It was possibly Ghesa's urge to express herself through imagery in a bold, unrefined technique and with a disregard for naturalism that appealed to Halsted-Berning.<sup>2</sup> The apparent naivety and ambiguous nature of her work also appealed to Halsted-Berning. Besides persuading her to make large sculptures (which would fetch good prices), she acted as a mediator between Ghesa and the market.

Since Ghesa received direct tutoring from Halsted-Berning, her early work appeared to be more in keeping with Halsted-Berning's ideas. Her sculptures were large, usually quite crude and often overtly sexual. Ghesa's work, however, over the years has developed and become refined both formally and in terms of content. Thus I have recently observed two emerging trends in Ghesa's work - Halsted-Berning directed themes and her self-initiated themes.

Most of the artists at the studio subscribe to a creative subservience where the artist produces work to Halsted-Berning's liking. Further she is often emphatically prescriptive to the studio artists. The artists are possibly motivated to do this because of the financial rewards and economic success associated with the unquestioning acceptance of Halsted-Berning's directions. Ghesa to a certain extent subscribes to Halsted-Berning's suggestions in her use of imagery and the composition of her sculptures, and by allowing Halsted-Berning and others to paint her sculptures. However Ghesa differs from the other members of the studio in that she

frequently breaks away from Halsted-Berning's prescriptions and produces sculpture which is completely self-inspired. It is this work which is of most interest to this research.

As one of the few Sotho-speakers at Ardmore, she seems to remain largely unaffected by her colleagues' work and their sources of inspiration. Many of her themes are self-inspired - the stimulus originating from dreams, her imagination or cultural background. In this chapter an attempt is made to consider the extent to which she draws on cultural and mystical sources in her work. In order to do this Ghesa's work will firstly be considered in the context of contemporary art by black South Africans, and secondly in terms of a more recent context of Southern Sotho sculpture. Further, consideration will also be given to the myths, customs and belief-systems of the Southern Sotho as well as her personal philosophy.

The rise of contemporary black art in South Africa in the last two decades, has necessitated a rapid evaluation and positioning of diverse forms. Subsequently, new terminologies and niches have been devised to position these works. Yet, it becomes evident that much of this art was rooted in traditional art forms and stemmed from particular cultural identities, drawing therefore from both dormant and prevalent forms. Nettleton (1989:52), in an article on transitional art, notes how its present form was moulded by a reaction to social changes, and by white patrons, who, from the nineteenth century, supported a steadily growing curio and tourist trade. The art produced for such trade lost its original symbolic and ritual significance adding a new dimension of meaning and adapting its original form to cater more for western aesthetic appeal.

Further, changing perceptions of western appreciation and attitudes to African Art (as discussed in the Introduction) brought about a degree of recognition for contemporary black art. Our perceptions, as a western audience, of the maker have changed from what was previously described as a 'good craftsman' to what is presently termed as 'the artist' whose work is ranked alongside urban and white artists (Nettleton 1989a:55). The gap between western tastes and traditional art is bridged by the notion that transitional art addresses the inequalities in the art infrastructure imposed by apartheid (De Jager 1992:4). Contemporary black art,

although innovative, can be seen as both a reflection of present conditions as well as an accumulation of sources over time.

On the one hand Ghesa's work can possibly be regarded as an indirect offshoot of both indigenous artistic and cultural expression. Further, tourist art in Lesotho could also have provided another precedent for her work. Evidence has it that during the 1930s, specifically in Lesotho, poor economic conditions prompted many "who were in the habit of eking out their livelihood by the manufacture of sundry native crafts, intensified their efforts and others turned to it as a means of earning a few shillings" (C.G. Damant cited in Sack 1989:9). Thus impoverishment in Lesotho as well as European interest in the 'exotic', stimulated trade between the Southern Sotho and the newcomers (Nettleton 1989a:52). The transition from traditional and tribal arts led to the development of an art, which in its contemporary form, derives both from Southern Sotho and foreign cultures.

In the 1930s a number of tourist artists emerged. Samuel Makoanyane was one of a few artists whose work was promoted by C.G. Damant. Damant was interested in native crafts and arts, and ran what he called a 'curio department' for many artists like Makoanyane which was a small business that provided outlets as far afield as Johannesburg, Cape Town and Rhodesia. Recognizing Samuel Makoanyane's potential, Damant took consignments of his work knowing that he would have no trouble selling them. Damant and Makoanyane developed an association which lasted until Makoanyane's death in 1944.

Working from old school books and other books he started by making small clay modelled animal figures with life-like accuracy as described by Damant:

"He began making various animals using illustrations from school and other books as his models. These animals were about six to nine inches high and weighed about four to five pounds each ... He turned out a great variety of these animals such as baboons, bucks, tigers, lions and several kinds of birds, but the most popular models he made at that time were frogs....Later on, still

using illustrations from books he produced figures of children" (Damant 1951:2)

Makoanyane's work was acclaimed for the realism and delicacy with which he modelled his animal and human figures. The vibrant life-like quality obtained through naturalism and intense observation of detail, contributed to Makoanyane's success among white patrons. His work was recognised as 'out of the ordinary' since his contemporaries were far less innovative and naturalistic in their approach (Damant 1951:2-5)

Thus it becomes evident that craftsmen like Makoanyane developed their skills and seized opportunities made available to them in a changing environment. However, Makoanyane cannot be viewed as merely a Southern Sotho craftsman supplying white patrons. Although his artistic occupation developed from the curio trade, his work reveals exceptional skill that transcended the curio object.

In attempting to establish the source of inspiration for Ghesa's work, Halsted-Berning was interviewed. She cited one example for an untitled work from 1990 (Figure 32), housed in the Johannesburg Art Gallery. Halsted-Berning claimed that the idea was inspired by a Zimbabwean sculpture (date unknown)(Figure 33) seen in Halsted-Berning's house by Ghesa.<sup>3</sup> The sculpture comprises two standing figures - a bird-like figure and a crocodile-man. Although there are common elements which link Ghesa's sculpture to the Zimbabwean sculpture and the composition of the piece is almost a copy, this source failed to significantly influence subsequent works. It must be stressed, however, that at intermittent phases while Ghesa is working on a sculpture, Halsted-Berning's input or criticism may change the emphasis, content or final imagery since she views Ghesa's sculpture purely from an aesthetic point of view rather than one linked to any cultural or historical source. Ghesa's work nevertheless, appears to also be based on more relevant personal imagery.

When asked if she had ever seen anything like the work she was making, she replied: " Yes, once." She was evidently at a market in Lesotho where she noted that a woman was making

small figurative sculptures.<sup>4</sup> This indicates that her work could possibly be linked to a local source.

By identifying Southern Sotho mythology as conveyed in material culture and oral traditions, it becomes evident that a host of sources distinguish Ghesa's work as originating partly from her cultural background. In looking for probable links in Ghesa's work to Southern Sotho sculptural tradition, there seems to be no actual recognised or documented investigation into a sculptural tradition among the Southern Sotho. As Sack says, the written information on traditional black art in South Africa is generally "insubstantial, unreliable and frequently conflicting" (1985:9). Lawton (1967) and Nettleton (1991) acknowledge the presence of zoomorphic clay sculptures among the Southern Sotho. They are known to model specific animals some of which may be seen in various museum collections, for example, *Lion* from the Campbell Collections (date unknown)(Figure 34) and *Warthog* from the Natal Natural History Museum (date unknown)(Figure 35). Accessioned into the Museum of Mankind in 1870 was a set of Southern Sotho animal figures (Nettleton 1991:40). Nettleton claims that these figures were probably made specially for sale and this instance also demonstrates the trade that took place between the Southern Sotho and Europeans. Before discussing references to clay sculptures, it seems necessary to focus on the significance of the animal idiom evident in Southern Sotho mythology.

The earliest reference is from Ellenberger's 1912 text entitled *The Basotho*. He discusses the importance of *liboko* (tribal emblems or clan totems). A clan totem is an emblem, usually of an animal, bestowed on each Southern Sotho tribe as a god-protector by *Melimo* - the invisible being and tribe creator. These animals were venerated, as the *liboko* symbolise the *balimo*<sup>5</sup> and are the link to the spirits of the departed. These animals are held sacred and Ellenberger notes that although they seem not to play an important role in daily life, they appear on shields, mantles and domestic utensils and therefore have collective significance. The totem animal may not be eaten by any clan member even in a time of famine for fear of bringing about a curse. Totem animals include the crocodile (the royal totem), lion, hare, duiker, elephant, baboon, wildcat, porcupine and monkey (Ellenberger 1969:242-243).

In looking at sources on zoomorphic sculpture Meyerowitz, in his 1936 *Report on the Possibilities of the Development of Village Crafts in Basotholand*, mentions a few cases where sculpture was practised:

"A widow, Mgohave Ramathe, ... makes animals based on old Basuto folk-lore of lions, baboons, snakes, ducks, etc. She also provides Europeanised vases and pots and markets these profitably in various Orange Free State towns" (Meyerowitz 1936:3).

Further he notes:

"Samuel Makoanyane (one of the few instances of a young man doing clay modelling). He is undoubtedly talented and has evolved a personal style of work. He makes crocodiles (the totem of the Bakuena clan), frogs, lions etc and small statuettes" (Meyerowitz 1936:3).

Thus it becomes clear that certain animals such as lions, crocodiles, snakes became prototypes and were specifically manufactured to accommodate the growing tourist trade, while some were incidentally also clan totems.

Lawton (1967:113) in her thesis on *Bantu Pottery in Southern Africa* states that "animal figures especially lions, horses and birds, are made in many areas for sale as ornaments or curios". An Appendix map showing "Special Pottery forms" indicates the presence of zoomorphic forms in the Lesotho region. These sculptures are probably made by vessel makers, who are mainly women (Lawton 1967:103). She also refers to the production of *likona* which are duck-shaped drinking vessels but adds that these have no ritual significance (Lawton 1967:104). This is significant since Ghesa has never elected to make *likona* (although she has indicated that she has seen them) but rather keeps to animals that appear to have greater symbolic and cultural relevance.

While the evidence cited in the above text gives little indication of what these early sculptures looked like, there are images of Southern Sotho clay figures at the Campbell Collections in the JW Grossert Slide Collection. Grossert acquired the pictures in 1960 and 1961 from a



collection belonging to Mrs Lowenstein in Ladybrand. These were said to have been mythological figures and are mostly anonymous except for two which were made by two women, Ester Lekoko and Ruth Seikaulo. This is in keeping with the contention that women worked with clay, and seems to indicate that Makoanyane is the exception rather than the rule.

The collection of slides depicts a number of clay animal and human figures (Figures 36a, 36b, and 36c). Unlike Makoanyane's figures, they are not naturalistic representations, but rather stylized versions of reality. They all appear fairly squat and weighty, lacking the ease, elegance and finely modelled detail of Makoanyane's figures.

The animals all have humanised physiognomic features and decoration seems a pronounced and important element. Attention has been drawn to features such as eyes, ears, nose and teeth, further accentuating these with the use of white and black paint which has been applied in dots and stripes to the natural red-bodied clay. In addition, there are more decorative lines, also applied with white and black paint, which follow the contour of the form.

Neither Ghesa nor Makoanyane use this mode of decoration. Instead, as will be shown, Ghesa's work has applied or incised decoration. She works with surface texture rather than relying on paint to create definition or an interesting surface. Ghesa, Makoanyane, and the artists of the *Warthog* (Figure 35) from the Natal Natural History Museum and the *Lion* (Figure 34) from the Campbell Collections all seem to be concerned more with sculptural form than decoration.

When one compares the *Lion* (Figure 34) from the Campbell Collections and the *Lion* (Figure 36a) from the Lowenstein Collection, similarities emerge in the way the humanised face has been imposed over the animal's muzzle. Both animals are modelled in the same crouching position in a frontal sphinx-like manner. While the surface is treated with paint on the Lowenstein figure, applied decoration in the form of nodules used to describe the mane of the Campbell Collections' *Lion*. Similar nodule-like formations can be seen in many of Ghesa's pieces especially in the crocodiles such as *Crocodile with Angels* (1995)(Figure 40).

*Warthog* (Figure 35) from the Natal Natural History Museum is a fairly life-like depiction of the animal. The surface is left untreated with evidence of carbon flashings from the wood firing process on the surface. As with Ghesa's work and the Lowenstein figures the body of the animal is supported by robust legs.

Ghesa's works can be said to share stylistic similarities with the above mentioned works, particularly in the simplification, and the way anthropomorphic and zoomorphic features have been combined. Features such as bulging eyes seem characteristic of both Ghesa's and the Southern Sotho sculptures. In general the eyes, ears, nose and lips have been applied onto a plane rather than modelled into the face. Four-legged animals, which have robust splayed legs, stand on the surface in much the same manner as a table stands on a floor. While many of these features may at first appear to be exclusive to Ghesa's work, investigation has shown that they appear typical of many indigenous art forms, particularly of Southern Sotho sculpture.

The combination of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic features is predominant in Ghesa's work. Many of her sculptures are of two-legged standing figures, often clothed and wearing shoes or 'takkies'.

*Goat-head Man* (1994)(Figure 38a & 38b) is an example of an anatomical combination of the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic. The figure resembles a man with a goat's head. His hands have been replaced by hooves and in one hoof, he holds a pipe to his mouth. He is clothed in a pair of trousers with 'takkies' on his feet. The two headed bird perched on his back seems to be significant since the bird frequently appears in much of her work.

I speculate that the bird could represent the lightning bird which is a messenger from the ancestors (Ellenberger 1969:250).<sup>6</sup> Given Ghesa's link with the ancestral shades (discussed later in this chapter), it could be an image she sees often in her dreams. The bird is said to characteristically have long wings. Ghesa usually depicts the bird swooping or perched on the back of a figure with outstretched wings as seen in this image of the *Goat-headed Figure* (1994)(Figure 38b). Sometimes there are two birds and at other times the winged creatures

look more like angels as seen in *Crocodile with Angels* (1995)(Figure 40). The angel is perhaps a substitute for the lightening bird, and the idea can also in all likelihood have been assimilated from other workers in the studio who often use the angels in both secular and sacred imagery.

Strange appendages sometimes appear on figures such as *Figure with Snake on Head* (1993)(Figure 39a & 39b) which is a depiction of a head and torso of a figure. The eyes, mouth and nostrils are exaggerated to give the figure a haunting facial expression. Two arm-like elements extend upwards on either side of the body, each with a face on the end. Looping over the head and shoulders of the figure is a large snake.

*Lion and Crocodile* (1994)(Figure 37) depicts two figures standing upright and back-to-back. The one figure, identified as male, has the head and tail of a lion. The other figure, has a head and the back of a crocodile described by appropriate nodules. The figures both have shoes on their feet while the crocodile wears a pair of trousers. The trousers do not seem to be a modest covering for nudity since the lion figure is left nude but for his shoes.

The crocodile appears regularly in Ghesa's work. On one occasion she indicated that her clan totem is the *Bakuena* or crocodile, but on other occasions she has refuted this statement saying that she was orphaned and therefore has no clan totem. The crocodile is commonly recognised as the royal emblem. In addition, Damant refers to the crocodile as a national emblem for all Southern Sothos. Hence the image of the crocodile is often included in the design of many objects from the Southern Sotho material culture. A painting by Barbara Tyrell, seen at the Campbell Collections, portrays a Southern Sotho woman wrapped in a mantle. The image of the crocodile is incorporated into the decorative patterning of the mantle.

However, Ghesa has implied that she is presently not motivated to reproduce the crocodile for reasons associated with its totemic importance but rather because of the favourable response given by Halsted-Berning and the market. More specifically Halsted-Berning favoured the nodules<sup>7</sup> that represented the crocodile's skin. Consequently these nodules have appeared on

other animals as seen in the piece entitled *Crocodile with Angels* (1995)(Figure 40). The sculpture depicts a two-legged, standing figure covered in nodules. The figure is winged and each wing grows into an angel.

Ghesa has elaborated on the meaning and symbolism behind the crocodile. According to her, the crocodile is devious as it will steal up behind a person and assume their 'colour' (ie their skin or appearance) causing bedlam.<sup>8</sup> In an interview Ghesa said that there are two crocodiles - a good one and a bad one.<sup>9</sup> To Ghesa the crocodile seems to be a symbol of discord and disharmony and has therefore transcended its totemic clan symbolism.

With reference to a sculpture of *A Crocodile and a Man* (1994), she explained how the crocodile came down from the mountain, represented by a box-like structure and crept up on a man, after which he assumed the man's identity.<sup>10</sup> This story is perhaps based on a Sotho folk-tale or legend. However, my research has not revealed any concrete evidence of such a tale.

If one considers that her themes and subjects may be derived partly from Southern Sotho folktales or mythology, alternative insights of her work emerge. On examining folk-tales it becomes apparent that she periodically includes figures and animals in her imagery that are common in Southern Sotho stories. The sculpture, *Cannibal Woman and Cooking Pot* (1994)(Figure 41), is such an example and depicts a stocky woman stooping over a large three-legged pot.

In October 1994 Ghesa gave another account of the source of her inspiration. She explained that the *balimo* or the ancestral shades were calling her to become a *mokoma* (that is a *sangoma*, diviner or seer).<sup>11</sup> She explained how she was constantly plagued by sickness because her family, who are Roman Catholic, did not want her to pursue her calling because of the obvious conflicts in the two belief systems. She had therefore obeyed their wishes and, by taking certain medicines, closed her 'accessibility' through which the ancestral shades could communicate.<sup>12</sup>

She claims that while she is receptive to contact with the ancestral shades she has vivid dreams and visions. She explained that the ideas for her sculptures come from these dreams and she was dismayed that the taking of the medicine had severed her contact with this inspirational source.<sup>13</sup> Her dismay, coupled with her lack of creative motivation at the time signifies that her dreams and visions obviously are of substantial importance to her, both as a source of inspiration and motivation to work. Consequently she felt that her art had suffered. This is substantiated by Halsted-Berning, who knew nothing of Ghesa's calling or of her sickness, yet mentioned how unproductive and uninspired Ghesa had become during this period. Ghesa has subsequently had the access to her calling 're-opened'. Halsted-Berning, again unaware of this fact, has mentioned a remarkable 'improvement' in the content of Ghesa's work.

Ghesa's work from 1993 and 1994, the time during which she was plagued by illness, seemed ironically to be more literal, depicting mainly people from Ghesa's day-to-day life, eg *Woman-next-door and Husband* (1994). In speaking to Ghesa about these works, she presented a somewhat tongue-in-cheek impression of her depiction. The inclusion of material objects like shoes, earrings and handbags adds an undertone of ironic humour to the work.

At the opening of Ghesa's first solo exhibition held at the Jack Heath Gallery in October 1995, Allyen Diesel<sup>14</sup> commented on Ghesa's work. To Diesel the work appeared characteristically dream-derived, and without any knowledge of Ghesa's background, she identified her as having some 'shaman link'. According to Diesel the translation for a 'shaman' is 'the wounded healer', similar to that the Southern Sotho term *mokoma* and the Zulu term *ithwasa* which describes someone who has been healed from a sickness and is qualified to treat others.<sup>15</sup>

It is not uncommon for artists to have spiritual links with the supernatural or to derive artistic inspiration from their dreams, visions or their subconscious. Ivor Powell confirms that most shamans are healers as well as makers of objects (1989:66-69).

Through her dreams, Ghesa acts as an intercessor between the survivors (those who have not yet departed life on earth) and the shades.<sup>16</sup> Ghesa says when she sleeps she often dreams;

when she wakes, she makes what she has seen in her dreams.<sup>17</sup> According to Berglund in his book on Zulu symbolism (1967:136) (see Endnote 15), dreams act as an important form of communication between the ancestral shades and the intercessor and are instrumental to the shades in calling their prospective servants. While Berglund refers to this phenomenon amongst Zulu-speakers, Ashton (1952:112 & 287) acknowledges the significance of the dream in Southern Sotho culture. It is thus from the communication with her ancestors that inspiration for her work is derived. In this respect Ghesa is similar to the Venda sculptor Noria Mabasa<sup>18</sup> and Jackson Hlungwane,<sup>19</sup> a sculptor from Gazankulu.

It seems necessary to emphasise that it would be incorrect to interpret all of her sculptures as having a metaphysical source of inspiration as only some of her work derives from her subconscious dream-world. However, as Diesel<sup>20</sup> pointed out, it seems incorrect to assume that all dream images are strange and mythological. There is nothing to indicate that visions may not include everyday persons and events. Berglund (1976:30) suggests that the ancestral shades can appear as normal people, so perhaps many of Ghesa's sculpted figures, both the imaginary and the more naturalistic<sup>21</sup>, are informed by dreams and other conscious and subconscious notions associated with the mind.

Nevertheless Ghesa's work currently shows two trends - a more imaginative, metaphysical trend derived from her cultural associations, and a more literal trend derived from her observations of the people around her. *The Tourist* or *Joe Silverberg* (1995)(Figure 43) shows the same attention to material detail as the sculpture of *Woman-next-door* (1994).

*The Tourist* or *Joe Silverberg* (Figure 43 and 43a) depicts a stereotypical image of a rather large, awkward man with cigarette in mouth, wearing a large checked shirt, and with a camera slung across his shoulder. The sculpture was decorated by Wonderboy Nxumalo with underglaze colours and glaze. Each square of the checked shirt was painted individually with images typical of Wonderboy's work (Figure 43a). These include images from daily life such as a bicycle, images that strong South African connotations such as a protea and a zebra as well as images of men fighting.

Ghesa has apparently declined treating the patina of her sculptures with colour, rather leaving them in their biscuit-fired state. Halsted-Berning who paints or oversees the colouring of Ghesa's sculpture, feels that Ghesa's work appears unfinished when left in its biscuit-fired state. She maintains that it appears more visually finished and sells more easily when it is treated than when it is left in a bisqued state. However there are other reasons for treating the surfaces of Ghesa's sculpture with colour. The pieces often break and crack during the firing process and many would have to be discarded if they were not mended with putty and glue, then painted to polished to disguise the fractures.

Ghesa's sculptures, like Ntshalintshali's, which are large, are often technically too difficult to glaze fire. Halsted-Berning has therefore also encouraged alternative methods of treating the surface of Ghesa's work. Thus the expression, creative process and end result become the primary concern while ceramic technical concerns seem to be secondary.

Many experimental methods (with varying degrees of success) have been tried in order to establish the most appropriate means of treating the surface of her work. Halsted-Berning tried glazing some pieces but found that, despite the technical difficulties encountered, the shiny surface of the glaze was not compatible with the sculptural qualities of her work. Unfortunately there are no documented examples of glazed ware.

*Small Figures Stacked* (1994)(Figure 42) demonstrates the result of a less successful treatment of the surface. The sculpture was painted with dark green, then speckled with gold paint. As a result the piece appears more like a contrived "do-it-yourself" patination out of a handicraft magazine.

The sculpture consists of a number of animals stacked in four tiers. The first tier consists a circular ring of eight beasts with their tail-ends all facing inwards and their heads looking outwards. Two animals are placed on the backs of the animals from the first tier to form the second tier. The animals stand side by side but facing in opposite directions. The next tier comprises a two-headed beast which stands perpendicular to and across the backs of the two

animals below it. The result of the animals all facing different directions implies that there is no single axis to determine a viewpoint. The apex of the sculpture is formed by the top tier - a winged figure. The idea was conceived by Halsted-Berning at a time when Ghesa was despondent about her inadequate income and poor sales. Halsted-Berning suggested that small sculptures would sell faster and take less time to make. At this time she was also encouraged to make more functional ware which, again, was largely unsuccessful due to Ghesa's disinterest.

The stacking of figures, as demonstrated in *Small Figures Stacked* (1990)(Figure 42), a formula used by Ntshalintshali to attain height in her sculptures was suggested by Halsted-Berning. Ghesa's stacked work was less successful since her preference for more robust sculpture steered her from this mode back to making large monolithic figurative sculptures.

In the past Halsted-Berning has generally been responsible for treating the surfaces of Ghesa's sculptures. However, since Halsted-Berning is of late too busy to colour Ghesa's sculptures, she often asks someone else to rub in shoe polish.<sup>22</sup> Shoe polish seems to have become a successful medium for treating the surface of Ghesa's sculptures as it enhances the sculptural qualities and gives a slightly mottled, plastic finish. It is also an easy method for anyone in the studio to do, requiring little training and supervision.

Acrylic paint, often applied to Ghesa's sculpture, is used in combination with shoe polish. It is used to brighten or highlight certain features on the sculpture. The colour accentuates features such as the eyes, teeth, hands or genitalia.

Halsted-Berning's argument, deeply rooted in the collaborative practice adopted in the studio, is that any one art piece can be made by a number of people, each contributing their particular specialised activity to bring the piece to its completion. This kind of collaborative production is, however, not peculiar to Ardmore. As guest speaker at the opening of Ghesa's first solo exhibition held at the Jack Heath Gallery in October 1995, Juliet Armstrong pointed out that at the turn of the century in many English ceramic factories, it was common practise for one person to make a piece while another was relegated to painting.



The collaborative production at the studio is intrinsically unproblematic yet in Ghesa's sculpture collaboration is not acknowledged. For example, work from the studio is always signed by both the maker and the painter, whereas Ghesa's contains no such acknowledgement. Further, Ghesa's *curriculum vitae* in Appendix 3 gives one the impression that her sculpture, from conception to completion, is entirely her own.

According to Halsted-Berning, Ghesa seems to be unperturbed by the fact that someone else paints her sculptures. She apparently seldom takes time to look at the pieces once they have been painted and is usually never given the opportunity to contribute to the choice and method of patination<sup>23</sup>. However, Garrett<sup>24</sup>, maintains that Ghesa, contrary to Halsted-Berning's opinion, showed great interest in the way in which her work was coloured. Ghesa told Garrett that she is keen to learn how to paint her works. One can speculate that Ghesa's lack of technical knowledge could have been misinterpreted by Halsted-Berning as disinterest.

It is interesting to note that she says she is seldom disappointed with the result of her sculptures once they have been painted. She also noted that it interests her to see how another artist chooses to apply the colour.<sup>25</sup>

Halsted-Berning is aware of the potential criticisms about the work being modified by someone else. She is attempting to address these issues by finding an appropriate firing technique to enhance the surface rather than rely on the effects of paint applied after firing.<sup>26</sup> However, the use of non-conventional pigments on a ceramic surface appear to be the best solution for enhancing Ghesa's pieces. It takes Ghesa a long time (usually up to a month) to build a piece and only a few pieces survive the stress of firing without cracking or breaking. If pieces were not repaired with glue, putty and paint, few works would be produced.

The sculpture of *Chickenman Mkize* (1995)(Figure 44) currently housed in the Durban Art Gallery, is a commemorative piece that Halsted-Berning prompted Ghesa to make. Chickenman was a self-taught artist known for his free-standing signs that took the form of triangular traffic markers. He was usually seen working or selling his art outside the Tatham

Art Gallery and in a sense became associated with the gallery as an unofficial resident artist. The messages written on the signs characteristically deal with contemporary urban culture.

Chickenman was born in 1959 near Richmond. He began producing art in the early 1980s, after his epilepsy forced him to retire from Clover Dairies where he sold chickens. He began making art after he had a dream where he saw a long line of animals for sale along a pavement. To fulfil his dream he began making dogs and porcupines on wheels. His works have been exhibited on numerous local and overseas exhibitions such as the 1990 MOMA exhibition entitled *Art of South Africa*, as well as in Canada. In 1996 the Tatham Art Gallery held a retrospective exhibition in his honour after he passed away after an epileptic fit in 1995.

Based on a newspaper clipping, Ghesa's sculpture of him, has ably captured his personality. In the making of this piece, however, Halsted-Berning intervened by insisting that Ghesa make larger arms for the figure. She helped Ghesa to replace the original arms after the firing, and the finished product was carefully painted.

The sculpture *Angel with Owls* (1995)(Figure 45) represents, in my opinion, the climax of Ghesa's work produced in 1995. She incorporated and combined the successful elements from many of her previous sculptures into this work. The sculpture is a depiction of a two-legged nude male figure. His back, chest and thighs are covered with textures that are representative of small feathers. His stylized face is reminiscent of those from her earlier works. Two short stubby wings project from his shoulders. Each shoulder is covered by the *amasumpa*-like nodules seen in her crocodile pieces. Perched on each shoulder is an owl. These could have possible associations with death or the coming of death, since the owl is associated with the anticipation of death and bad news in a Christian context (Cooper 1987) and is also seen as "a bird of ill-omen" to Southern Sothos (Ellenberger 1969:252). A leopard pelt modelled on the head (Figure 45a) forms the hair of the figure. While the hind legs and tail form the hair-line and side burns making the distinction between hair and animal ambiguous, the head of the animal hangs down the back of his neck and only becomes apparent to the viewer when seen from the rear. It is interesting to note that in Ntshalintshali's sculpture of *David and Goliath*

(1990) a similar pelt formed Goliath's hair. This instance demonstrates the exchange and borrowing that occurs between workers in the studio.

The above mentioned work is an example of how Ghesa's work has progressed and matured into a stronger, more personalized style showing greater control of the clay. This could possibly be the result of her greater independence from Halsted-Berning. Ghesa has also elected to sit and work in a separate space in the studio. Her exclusion from the rest of her colleagues came with the onset of her illness, her reason being that her ancestral shades could communicate with her and she would be less inclined to be distracted by her colleagues.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, by working on her own she has forged and maintained her identity in a coherent personal style and is thus seldom influenced by her colleagues and their sources of inspiration.

In conclusion it has become evident through the investigation of Ghesa's work that her mode of expression, ostensibly contemporary and innovative, is possibly rooted in significant aspects of Southern Sotho culture and mythology. The imagery is also influenced by her subconscious junction with the metaphysical and by the dichotomy between her dream world and the responses, demands and interventions that Halsted-Berning imposes. Halsted-Berning has, on occasions, prompted the inclusion of imagery which cannot be linked to any Southern Sotho sources or Ghesa's dream-derived imagery.

## ENDNOTES

1. Personal interview conducted with Ghesa in 1994.
2. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1994.
3. Personal interview conducted with Halsted Berning in 1994.
3. On another occasion she contradicted herself by saying that people in Lesotho only make pots (Personal interviews conducted with Ghesa in October 1994 and November 1994).
5. Ashton 1952:317: *balimo*: plural for *melimo*, ancestral shades.
6. While discussing the significance of the bird in Ghesa's work, Mveli suggested that the bird had malevolent associations in Zulu mythology (in a personal interview conducted with Mveli in October 1994). One could speculate, given Ellenberger's explanation, that there is a degree of commonality to both cultures' interpretation of the bird.
7. I identify these nodule formations as similar to *amasumpa* and when the issue was addressed with Halsted-Berning (Personal interview conducted in October 1995) she acknowledged the similarities. *Amasumpa* are one of many motifs found on the exterior of Zulu beer drinking vessels and are usually characterised by a wart-like nodule (Personal interview conducted with Armstrong in March 1996).
8. Personal interview conducted with Ghesa in August 1994.
9. Personal interview conducted with Ghesa in 1995.
10. Personal interview conducted with Ghesa in August 1994.
11. Ashton 1952:284: "*Mokoma* (pl.bakoma): persons who have successfully undergone the ritual cure for the 'spiritual' and the nervous disorder *motheketheke*, and are thereby qualified to treat others suffering from this illness, and who acquire special powers of divination".
12. According to Octavia Zondo, a Zionist sangoma, who interviewed Ghesa in October 1995, she was chosen by her ancestral shades to take up this calling. Her refusal to take up this calling perpetuated an illness. Symptoms of this illness include madness, nausea, vomiting, fatigue, pains in the body, blindness, deafness and crippling effects to the body. Allyen Diesel, Lecturer in the Religious Studies Department at the University of Natal, says that women have been known to be close to death and on accepting the calling, miraculously return to good health (Personal interview conducted with Diesel in

- October 1995). This is substantiated by Berglund (1967:138) who describes this illness as causing pain in various parts of the body. Further, the illness cannot be cured by any medicine if it is not in agreement with the shades.
13. Personal interview conducted with Ghesa in October 1994.
  14. Personal interview conducted with Allyen Diesel, Lecturer in Department of Religious Studies, University of Natal in October 1995.
  15. There seems to be some difficulty in establishing the correct term since, it seems that she could undergo initiation either in Lesotho or KwaZulu-Natal since the calling is the same regardless of whether the initiate is Sotho or Zulu. Ashton (1952:183) contends that the presence of *makoma* in a fairly new occurrence, derived from the introduction of the Thembis, and that the *bakoma* really only occur in the South and Eastern regions of Lesotho.
  16. There seems to be some difficulty in establishing whether or not the shades are Sotho or Zulu. Because Ghesa has moved from Lesotho and is living amongst Zulu-speakers, and uses her maiden name, Maduna, which is both a Sotho and Zulu name, it seems probable to assume that Ghesa fulfils the role of a Zulu rather than Sotho diviner and the links to Zulu culture may in fact be closer than initially acknowledged (Interview conducted with Zionist sangoma, Octavia Zondo in October 1995).
  17. Personal interview conducted with Ghesa in November 1994.
  18. Noria Mabasa (1938) lives and works in Venda as a sculptor. Prompted by her dreams, she began in the 1970s to make clay sculptures. Her images reflected the personalities of people she observed around her. These works were handbuilt using the coil method and then pit fired. In 1976 she began to work in wood, but currently works in either media, depending on the dictates of her dreams (Cruise 1991:102&192).
  19. Jackson Hlungwane (1923), a contemporary South African sculptor, has been identified as having shaman links. Ivor Powell describes him as a prophet and a healer (1989:22) and like Ghesa, his work is inspired by a multitude of sources, namely the Bible, his visions from God, Tsonga symbology and his personal mythologies (Powell; 1989:22).
  20. Personal interview conducted with Diesel in October 1995.
  21. Berglund (1967:95) suggests that the ancestral shades may appear to humans in many forms including a snake without a forked tongue.

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22. Personal interview with Halsted-Berning conducted in 1995.
  23. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1995.
  24. Personal interview conducted with Garrett in March 1997.
  25. Personal interview conducted between Garrett and Ghesa in March 1997.
  26. Personal interview conducted with Halsted-Berning in 1995.
  27. Personal interview conducted with Ghesa in October 1994.

## CONCLUSION

Under the direction of Halsted-Berning, Ardmore Art has flourished, enjoying both financial prosperity and numerous artistic accolades. Appendix 2 lists the numerous awards acquired by specific artists, the extensive representation of work in both private and public collections, and the prestigious exhibitions in which certain Ardmore artists participated.

Halsted-Berning, who initiated the studio and stimulated production on the one hand, and acted as cultural broker or mediator on the other, has contributed substantially to the success of the studio.

Ardmore Studio can be seen as having considerable impact on South African ceramics in that the approaches have been largely unconventional, challenging many traditions and preconceived notions associated with ceramics. Halsted-Berning and Ntshalintshali, as the first artists to exhibit ceramics painted in acrylic paints on APSA exhibitions, could possibly be seen as largely responsible for initiating this acceptance by controlling bodies such as APSA. In creating a highly decorative surface, embellished with brightly coloured commercial underglaze pigments and glazed in an earthenware glaze, Ardmore studio ware has further challenged Anglo-Oriental traditions established by early twentieth century South African ceramists.

The focus of this study has been on identifying the sources and origins of stylistic and thematic elements in their works. It has become apparent that inspiration was derived largely from two sources. Halsted-Berning forged a creative vision based on her partiality for perceived 'naive', 'exotic' and 'other' qualities in art. This has been identified as an 'ethnic' character which is evident in Ardmore art. She relied on the artists to process the visual information with which she plied them, and reproduce a version governed by their personal interpretations. However,

further investigation revealed that the artists' vision was also swayed by their own personal and cultural perceptions.

To both Halsted-Berning and her presumed audience, the motifs and decoration used by the artists appear to reflect an indigenous origin. However this is not always true, since examples in the text have indicated that much of the imagery used by artists, whether indigenous or exotic, is foreign to them. The imagery used in Ardmore work seems perhaps to be based on a fictional Afro-ethnicity, and the artists have accordingly produced art to satisfy this preconceived notion of a predominantly western audience.

Commercial success can be attributed to Halsted-Berning capitalising on the audience's preconceived notions of ethnic art by fulfilling the westerners search for the 'naive', the 'exotic', the 'different' and to capture the essence and 'mystery' of Africa (Preston-Whyte 1989:124). Preston-Whyte explores the notion of ethnicity in terms of its appeal to the white market:

"A more sophisticated version of ethnic imagery suggests that there is something different, and intrinsically valuable, about the African experience, something that derives, perhaps, from the uniqueness of what is often referred to as the 'African Psyche' and which is said have much to offer to the jaded tastes of the West" (Preston-Whyte 1989:125).

The existence of the studio has many far-reaching positive social implications in that it operates as more than merely an art centre. In many ways the studio addresses the issues that Peder Gowenius from Rorke's Drift raised about making people aware of their situation and their strengths (Jephson 1990:6). In terms of current South African socio-economic needs, the studio offers much in the way of job creation, artistic expression, self accomplishment and social upliftment for the artists. Appendix 2 indicates that most of the artists, prior to coming to Ardmore were unemployed.



Research has revealed that while Halsted-Berning has imposed many of her preferences in the continuous formulation of an Ardmere style, a degree of individuality among studio artists, based on affinity with their indigenous culture, western culture and the material provided by Halsted-Berning, also persists. This presents another dimension to the notion of ethnic identity as an element of the artist's cultural background can reflect personal interrelations between ideas and convictions, customs and beliefs, derived from western, indigenous and traditional sources.

For example, the discussion of Ntshalintshali's sculpture centres around the issues of Ntshalintshali's identity derived from her Zulu and Christian-based backgrounds. Ntshalintshali presents her audience with a new pictorial interpretation of biblical themes. The personalising of these subjects was encouraged by Halsted-Berning who also imposed some of her own perceptions on Ntshalintshali's interpretations. These expectations in turn contributed to the formation of the Ardmere style that was to follow. Thus Ntshalintshali, as the first person to work with Halsted-Berning, set a precedent for other artists.

Ghesa, on the other hand, while being exposed to the same stimuli in the studio, has produced work that is distinctly different. In a discussion of Ghesa's work, it became evident that she explores both a personal vision inspired by her dreams, as well as ideas and images possibly derived from her Southern Sotho background. As with Ntshalintshali, these were further influenced by Halsted-Berning's expectations of her work and those imposed by the market, and also marginally by studio styles.

Wonderboy demonstrates more encompassing cultural experiences. Images of western material culture such as comic-strip characters, guns and motor cars have been depicted as have ideologically-based imagery influenced by his Rastafarian, Zulu and current political interests. Thus, while the three above mentioned artists share similar rural backgrounds, idiosyncratic choices in content are evident.

The studio currently runs as a fully established operation with a full complement of trained artists and a few newcomers. As a semi-informal training centre, the studio has equipped artists with highly skilled artistic capabilities. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the studio is fully established, the artists still depend on-going criticism and stimulation. Thus Halsted-Berning's role in the studio and the role of subsequent employees such as Garrett, have become crucial in creating and maintaining the studio dynamics, initiating new fresh ideas, and monitoring a high standard of production. The relationship between Halsted-Berning and the artists combined with the collaborative nature of the studio was identified in Chapter One as a synergism that the studio is more than the sum of its artists. Hence the interdependency among the artists and between Halsted-Berning and the artists is such that if one member were absent, the chain of production would be broken or weakened.

The studio functions as a prominent and successful commercially-driven art centre that is recognised both in South Africa and abroad. In essence the success in the operation possibly lies in the effective synthesis of resources and talents from both the artists and Halsted-Berning and subsequent assistants. The studio, which developed spontaneously as a response to individual and collective circumstances, is sustained by an audience receptive to its art and by an internal momentum of assimilation and creativity.

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## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

*Information regarding the medium, size, date, whereabouts  
has been included where possible.*

- |    |  |      |
|----|--|------|
| 1  | <b>Visual material pinned up on pinned boards around studio.</b>   |      |
| 2  | <b>Women dressed in popular prints</b>   |      |
| 3  | <b><i>Vase with Tigers and Deer</i></b><br>Bonnie Ntshalintshali<br>Height: Approx. 40cm<br>White earthenware clay and underglaze            | 1994 |
| 4  | <b>horor vacuii</b><br>White earthenware clay and underglaze<br>Width: Approx. 50cm  | 1994 |
| 5  | <b>Page from Wonderboy's Sketch Book</b><br>Wonderboy Nxumalo<br>Drawing in ballpoint pen  | 1994 |
| 5a | <b>Page from Wonderboy's Sketch Book</b><br>Wonderboy Nxumalo<br>Drawing in ballpoint pen  | 1994 |
| 6a | <b>Source material for Figure 6</b>  |      |
| 6b | <b>Source material for Wonderboy's work</b>  |      |
| 6c | <b><i>Plate: The Zulu Warrior</i></b><br>Wonderboy Nxumalo<br>Width: 17cm<br>White earthenware clay and underglaze<br>Owned by Glenda Mentis | 1996 |
| 7  | <b><i>Birds</i></b><br>(Museum Services Slide Collection)<br>Bonnie Ntshalintshali<br>Terracotta clay painted with Plaka paints              | 1988 |

- 8 ***Animal Candlestick Holder*** c.1985  
(Museum Services Slide Collection, Pietermaritzburg)  
Bonnie Ntshalintshali  
Terracotta clay painted with Plaka paints
- 9 ***Animal Candlestick-Holder II*** c.1985  
Bonnie Ntshalintshali  
Terracotta clay painted with Plaka paints
- 10 ***Selection of Candlestick Holders*** c.1990  
Length: Approx. 15cm  
Terracotta clay painted with Plaka paints
- 11 **Page From Bonnie's Sketch Book** 1985  
Bonnie Ntshalintshali  
Coloured pencils drawings
- 11a **Page From Bonnie's Sketch Book** 1985  
Bonnie Ntshalintshali  
Coloured pencil drawings
- 12 ***Noah's Ark*** 1988  
Bonnie Ntshalintshali  
Terracotta clay painted with Plaka paints  
70 x 47 x 40cm  
Tatham Art Gallery Collection, Pietermaritzburg
- 13 ***Last Supper*** 1990  
Bonnie Ntshalintshali  
52 x 32 x 55cm  
Terracotta clay painted with Plaka paints  
Standard Bank Corporate Art Collection, Johannesburg
- 14a ***Eve*** 1990  
Bonnie Ntshalintshali  
Terracotta clay painted with Plaka paints  
Height: 123cm  
Halsted-Berning's Collection
- 14b ***Adam*** 1990  
Bonnie Ntshalintshali  
Terracotta clay painted with Plaka paints  
Height: 115cm  
Halsted-Berning's Collection
- 14c **Detail: Eve's Headdress**
- 14d **Detail: Adam's Headdress**
- 14e **Detail: Adam's Base**

- 14f **Yoruba Sculpture** 1938  
Wood
- 14g **Detail: Eve's Base**
- 14h **Detail Eve's Base**
- 15a ***Jonah and the Whale*** 1990  
Bonnie Ntshalintshali  
Terracotta clay painted with Plaka paints  
60 x 60 x 70cm  
Halsted-Berning's Collection
- 15b ***Jonah and the Whale***  
Stained Glass illustration: *Mysteries from the Bible*  
Halsted-Berning's Collection  
Terracotta clay painted with Plaka paints
- 15c **Print of Jonah and the Whale** 1991  
Serigraph  
Halsted-Berning's Collection
- 16 ***The Nativity*** 1989  
Bonnie Ntshalintshali  
Terracotta clay painted with Plaka paints  
Height: 110cm  
1820 Foundation, Grahamstown
- 16a ***Annunciation*** 1440-45  
Fra Angelico
- 16b **Detail: Annunciation from Nativity**
- 17 ***The Resurrection*** 1990  
Bonnie Ntshalintshali  
Terracotta clay painted with Plaka paints  
Height: 110cm  
1820 Foundation, Grahamstown
- 17a **Detail: Base and Judas Tempting Christ**
- 17b **Detail: Rear Panel of Judas Tempting Christ**
- 17c **Detail: Frontal View of Pieta**
- 17d **Detail: Rear view of Pieta**
- 17e **Detail: Frontal view of Ascension**
- 17f **Detail: Rear view of Ascension**
- 18 ***Last Judgement*** 1993  
Bonnie Ntshalintshali  
Terracotta clay painted with Plaka paints  
Height: 113cm  
Unisa Permanent Collection, Pretoria

- 19 ***Lobola or Zulu Wedding*** 1990  
 Bonnie Ntshalintshali  
 Terracotta clay painted with Plaka paints  
 Approx. 27 x 46 x 30cm  
 South African National Gallery
- 19a **Detail: Bridal Couple and Party**  
 19b **Detail: Two Warriors and Sleeping Mats**  
 19c **Detail: Two Women and Blankets**
- 20 ***Lobola*** 1988  
 Bonnie Ntshalintshali  
 Terracotta clay painted with Plaka paints  
 35 x 30 x 30cm  
 Tatham Art Gallery Collection, Pietermaritzburg
- 21 ***Tea Party*** 1993  
 Bonnie Ntshalintshali  
 Terracotta clay painted with Plaka paints  
 Cultural History Museum Collection, Cape Town
- 22 ***Self Portrait*** 1990  
 Bonnie Ntshalintshali  
 Terracotta clay painted with Plaka paints  
 20 x 24 x 26cm  
 Owned by Juliet Armstrong
- 23 ***Farmer Visits Sangoma*** 1994  
 Bonnie Ntshalintshali  
 Terracotta clay painted with Plaka paints  
 Approx. 18 x 18 x 25cm
- 24 ***Toyota*** 1991  
 Bonnie Ntshalintshali  
 Terracotta clay painted with Plaka paints
- 25 ***Madonna and Child*** 1993  
 Bonnie Ntshalintshali  
 Terracotta clay painted with Plaka paints  
 Approx. 10 x 10 x 20cm
- 26 ***Mother and Child*** 1993  
 Bonnie Ntshalintshali  
 Terracotta clay painted with Plaka paints



- 36a ***Southern Sotho Clay Figure*** 1960-61  
Unknown  
Lowenstein Collection, JW Grossert Slide Collection, Campbell Collections
- 36b ***Southern Sotho Clay Figure*** 1960-61  
Unknown  
Lowenstein Collection, JW Grossert Slide Collection, Campbell Collections
- 36c ***Southern Sotho Clay Lion*** 1960-61  
Unknown  
Lowenstein Collection, JW Grossert Slide Collection, Campbell Collections
- 37 ***Lion and Crocodile*** 1994  
Josephine Ghesa  
Terracotta clay, paint and polish  
Height: Approx. 70cm
- 38a ***Goat-Head Man*** 1994  
Josephine Ghesa  
Terracotta clay  
Height: Approx. 70cm
- 38b **Side View: Goat-Head Man**
- 39a ***Figure with Snake on Head*** 1993  
Josephine Ghesa  
Terracotta clay, paint and polish  
Height: Approx. 22cm
- 40 ***Crocodile with Angels*** 1995  
Josephine Ghesa  
Terracotta clay, paint and polish  
Height: Approx. 45cm  
Ian Garrett's private collection
- 41 ***Cannibal Woman and Cooking Pot*** 1994  
Josephine Ghesa  
Terracotta clay, paint and polish  
Height: Approx. 45cm
- 42 ***Small Stacked Figure*** 1994  
Josephine Ghesa  
Terracotta clay and acrylic paint  
Height: Approx. 25cm



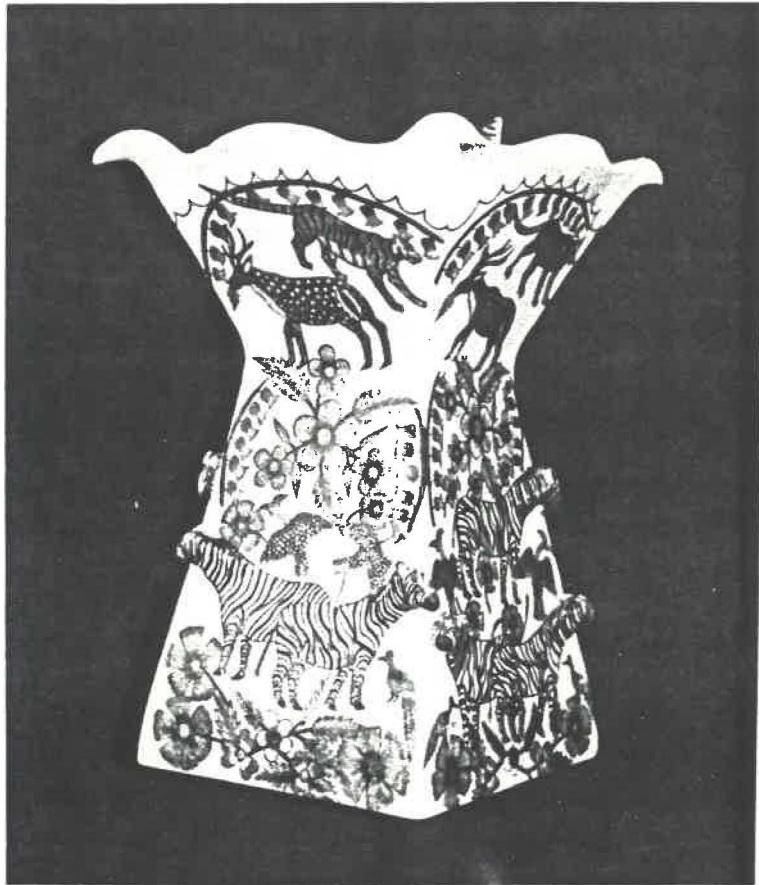
- 43 *The Tourist or Joe Silverberg* 1995  
Josephine Ghesa  
Terracotta clay, painted with commercial underglaze pigments, and glazed  
Height: Approx. 75cm
- 43a **Detail: The Tourist or Joe Silverberg**
- 44 *Chickenman Mkize* 1995  
Josephine Ghesa  
Terracotta clay, paint and polish  
Height: Approx. 60cm  
Durban Art Gallery
- 45 *Angel with Owls* 1995  
Josephine Ghesa  
Terracotta clay, paint and polish  
Height: Approx. 60cm
- 45a **Detail: Angel with Owls**



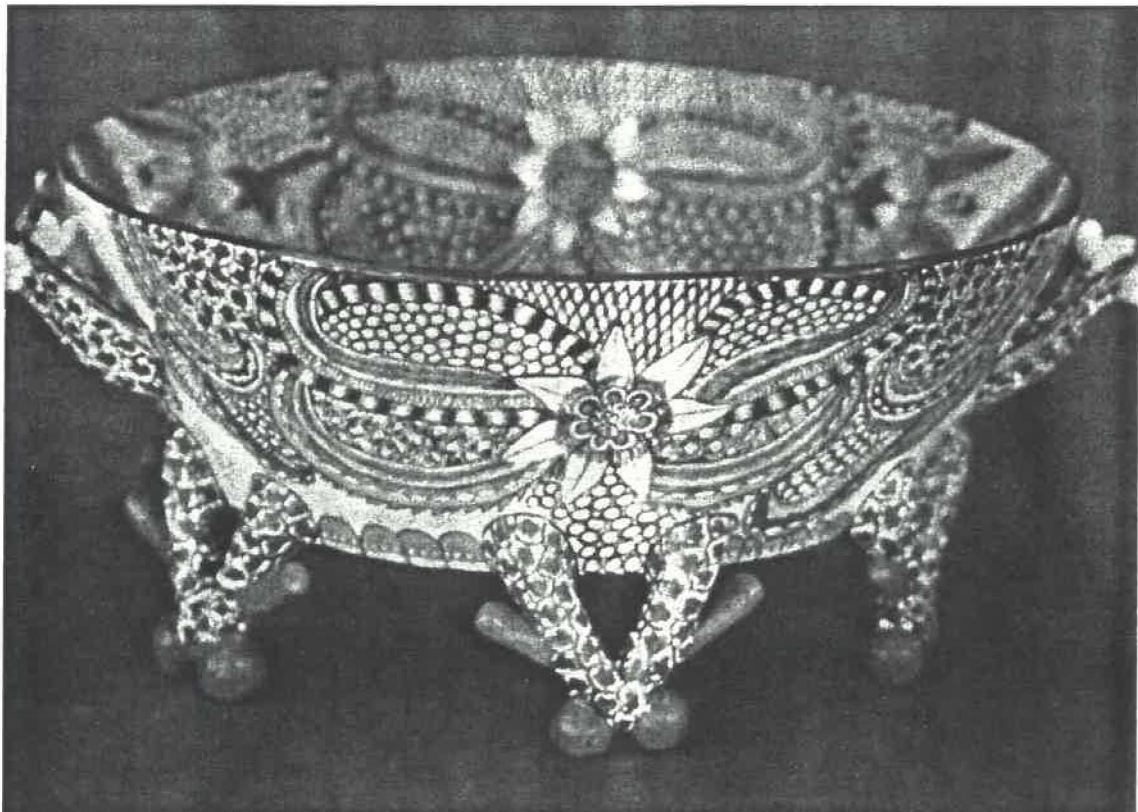
Figure 1



Figure 2

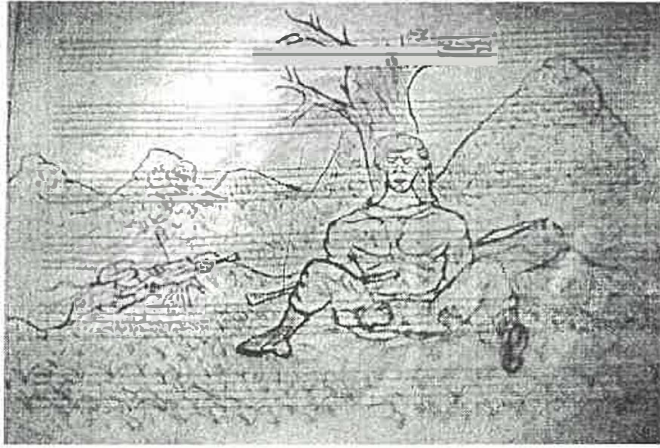


**Figure 3**



**Figure 4**





**Figure 5**



**Figure 5a**



Figure 6a

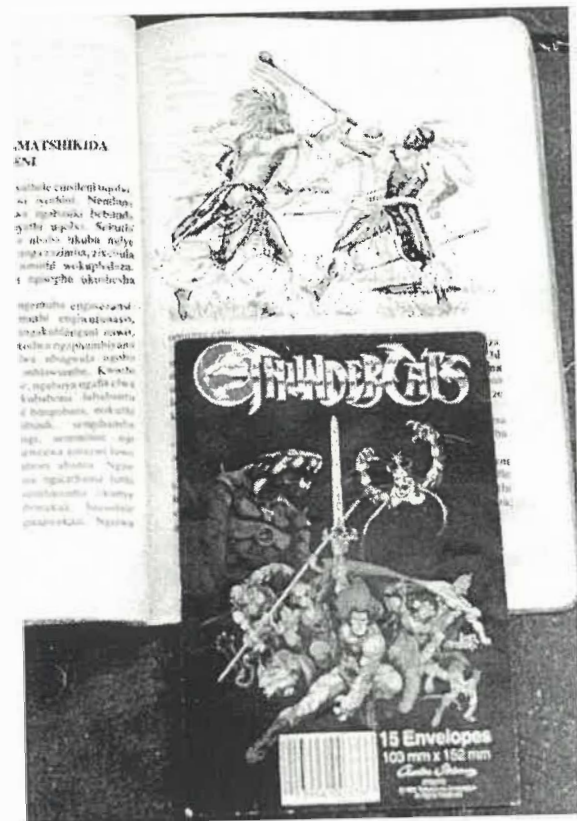
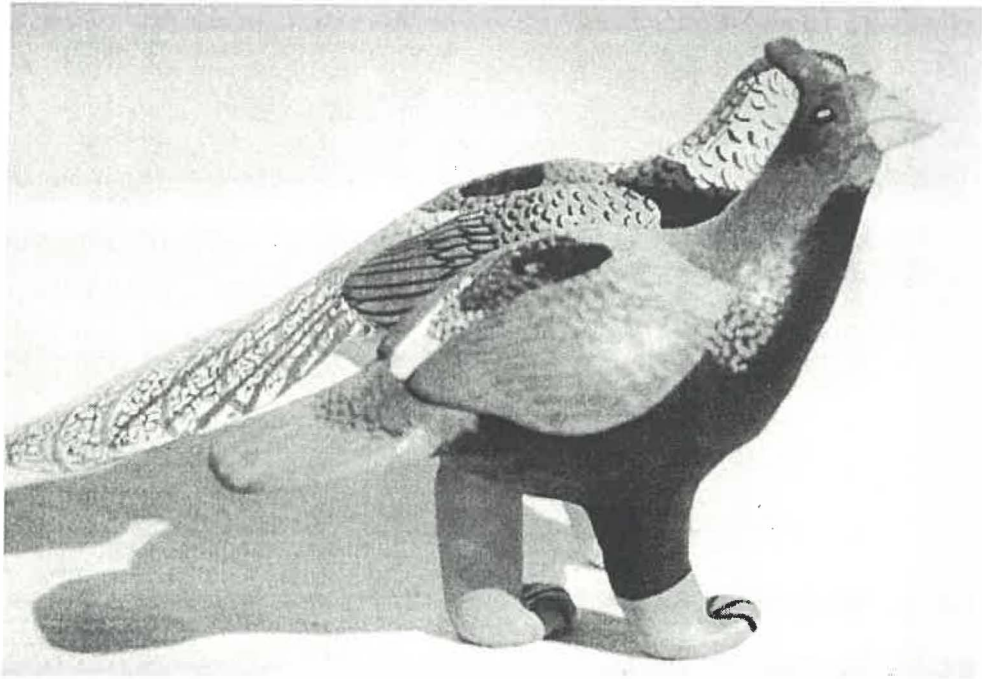


Figure 6b

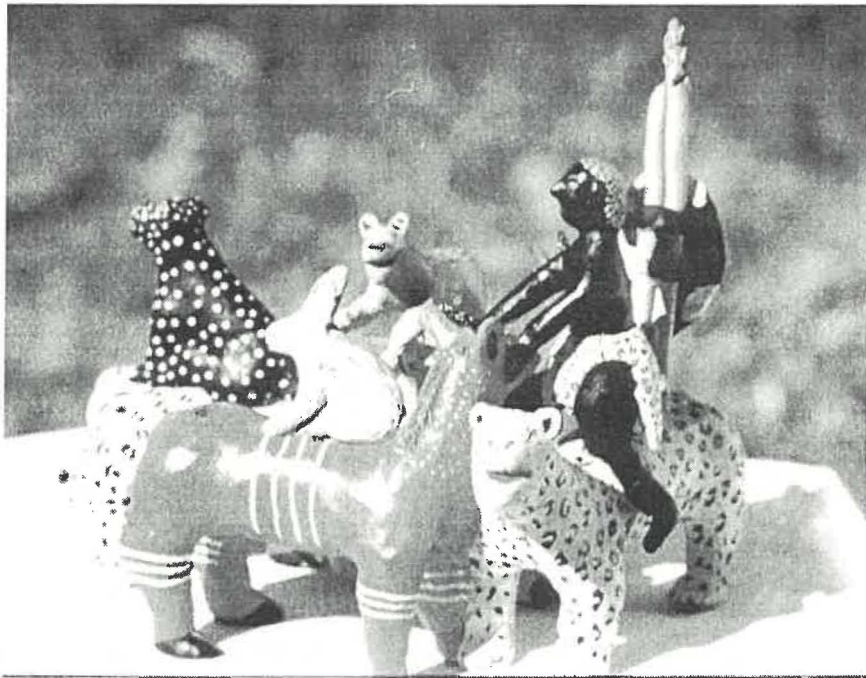


Figure 6c





**Figure 7**



**Figure 8**



Figure 9

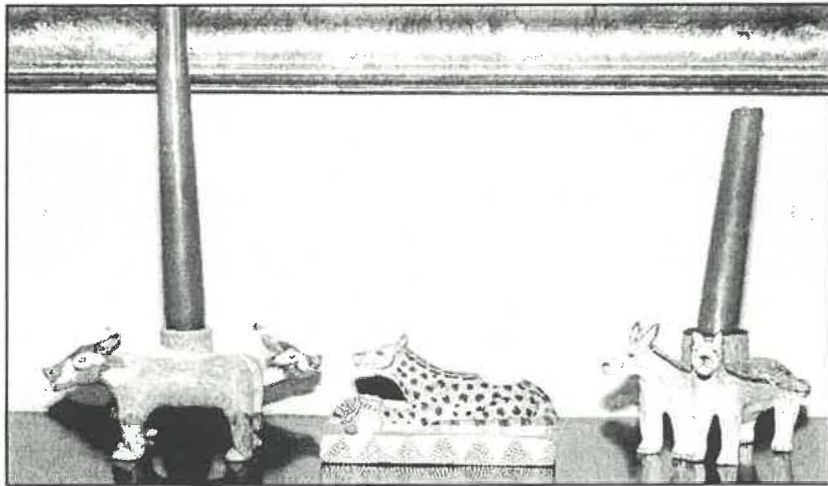
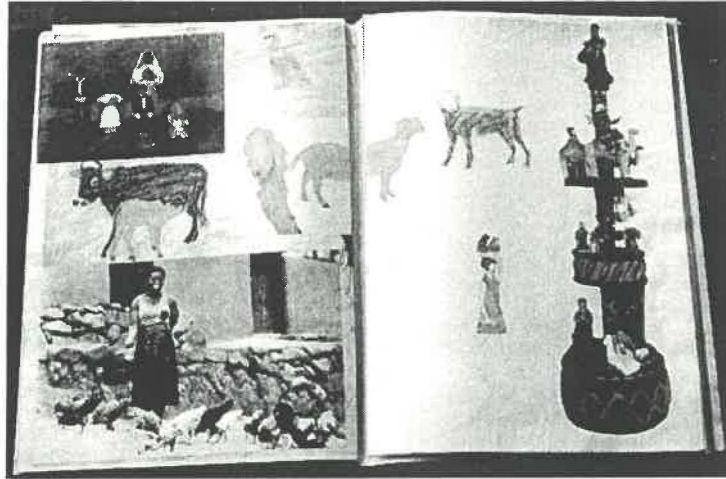
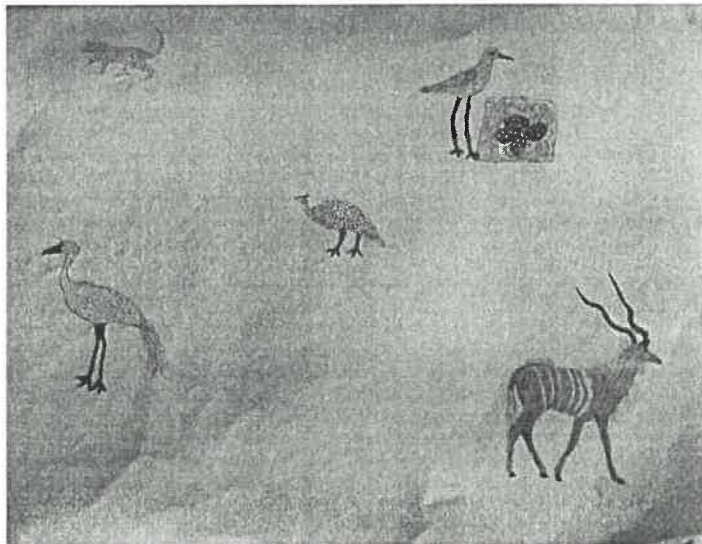


Figure10





**Figure 11**



**Figure 11a**



Figure 12

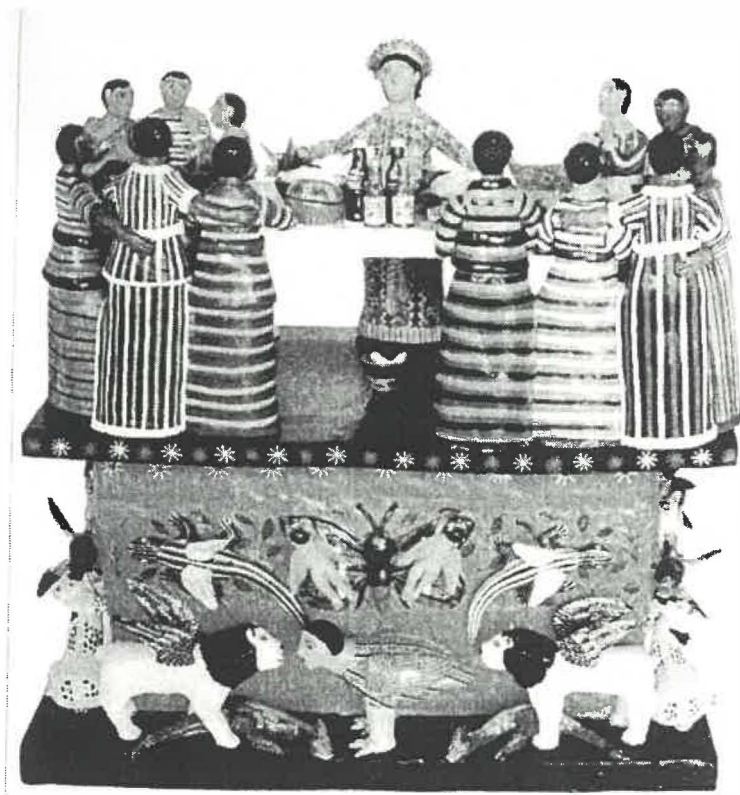


Figure 13



Figure 14c and 14d

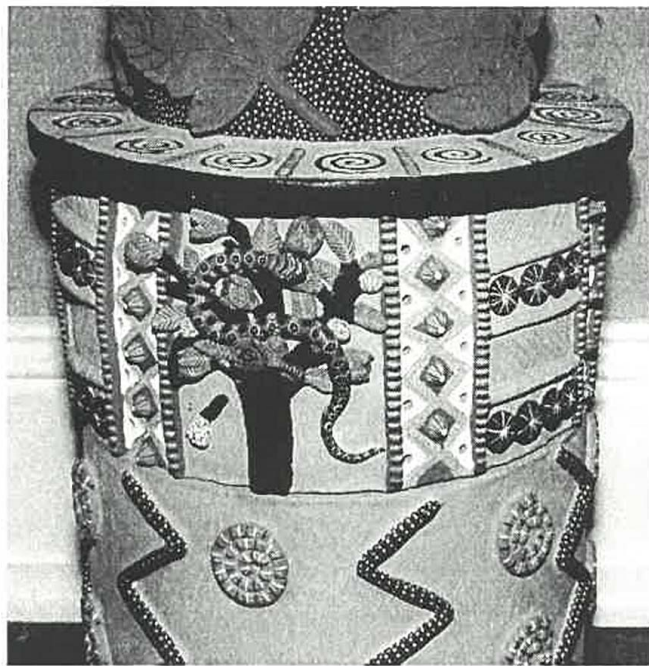


Figure 14e





Figure 14a and 14b

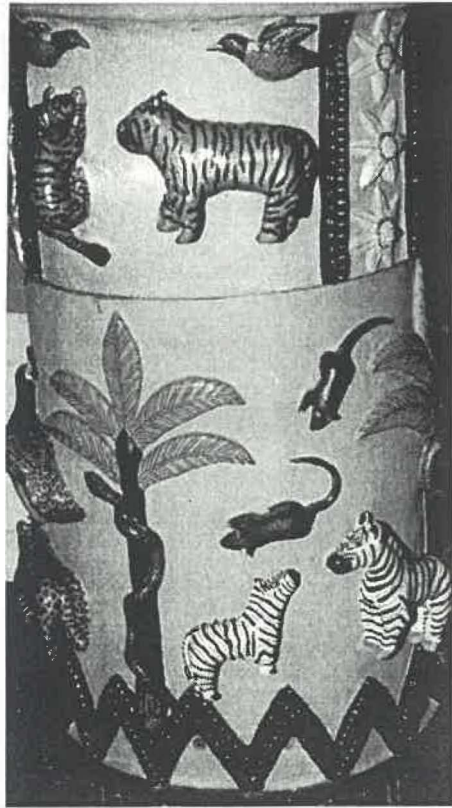


Figure 14g and 14h

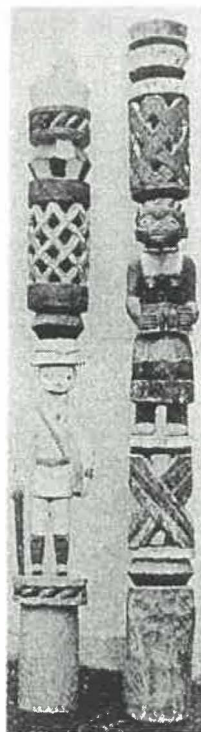


Figure 14f



Figure 15a

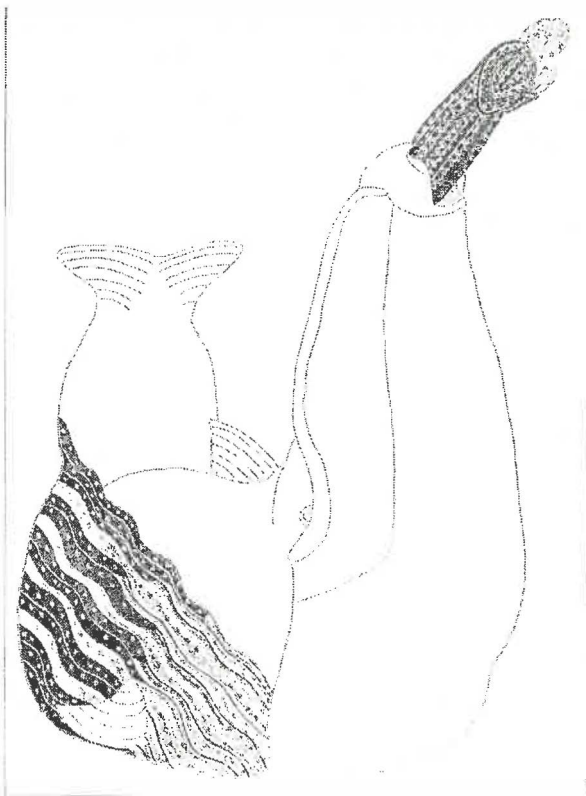


Figure 15b and 15c





Figure 16a and 16b



Figure 16



Figure 17





Figure 17a

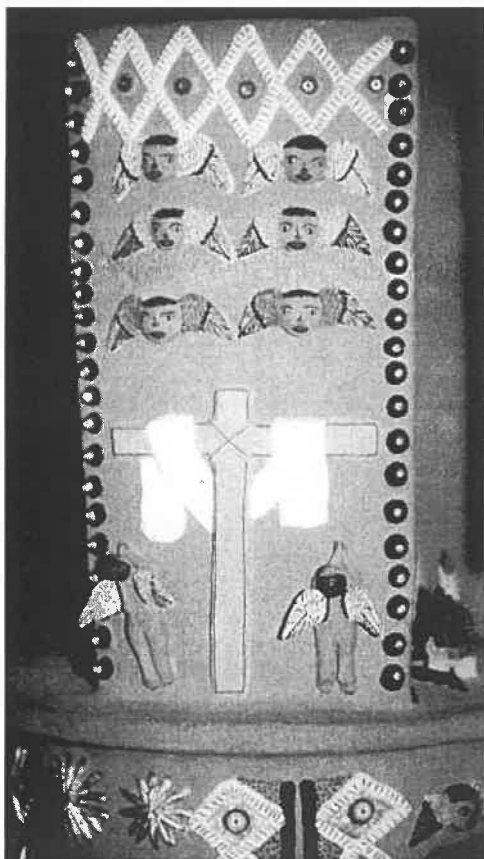


Figure 17b



Figure 17c and 17d



Figure 17e and 17f



Figure 18



Figure 19





**Figure 19a**



**Figure 19b**



**Figure 19c**



**Figure 20**



**Figure 21**



Figure 22



Figure 23



Figure 24





Figure 25



Figure 26

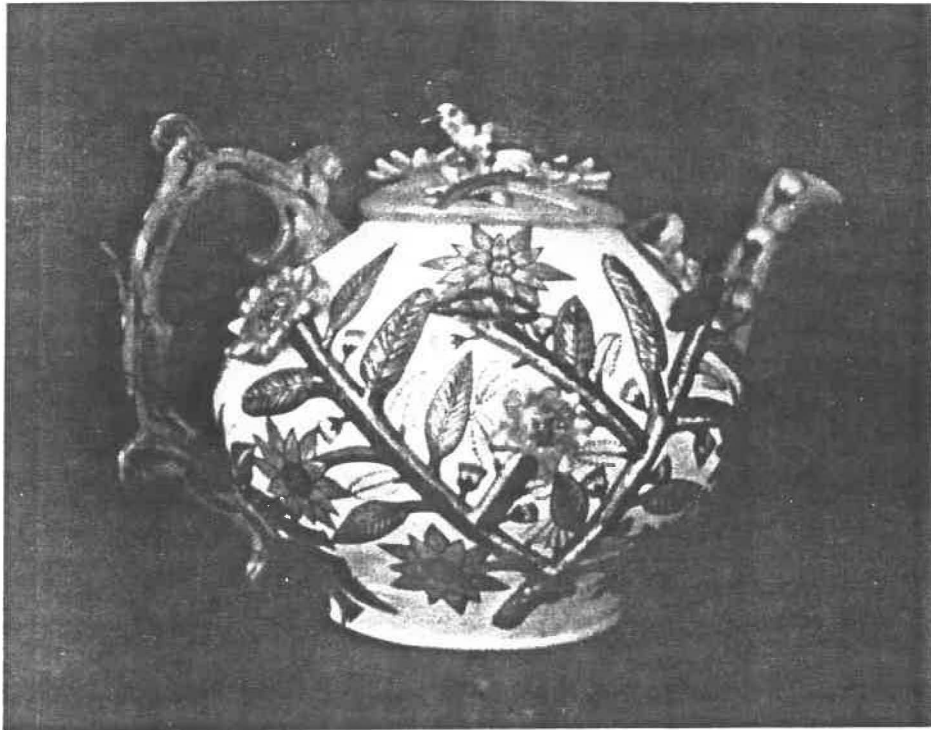


Figure 27

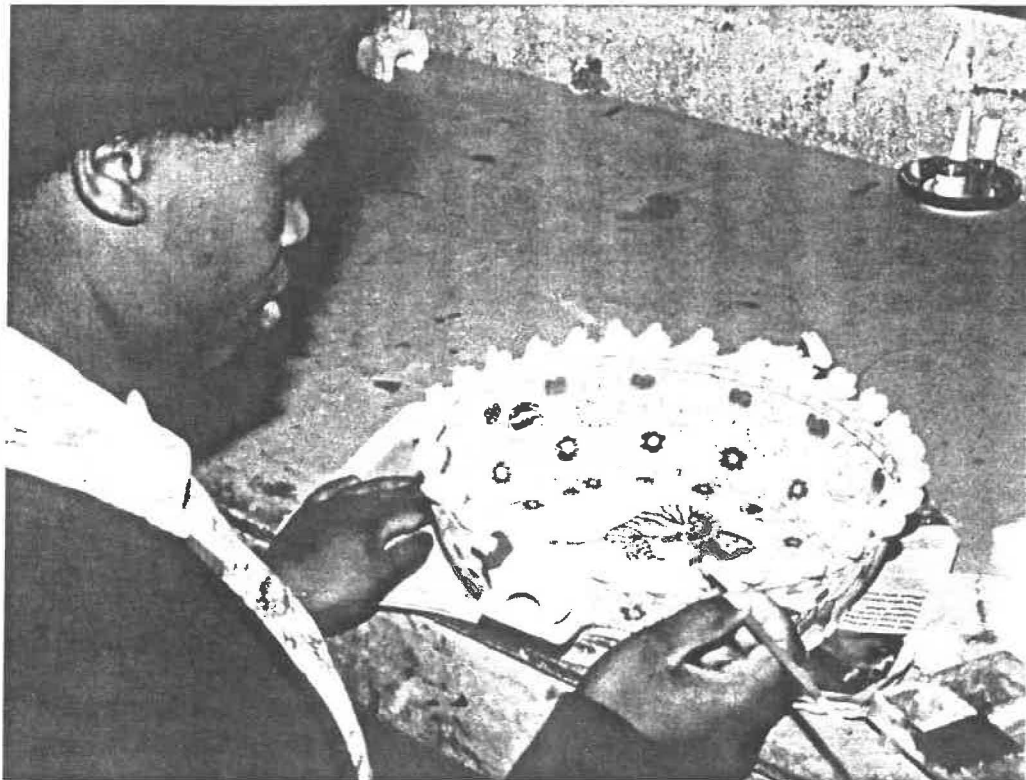


Figure 28



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Figure 29

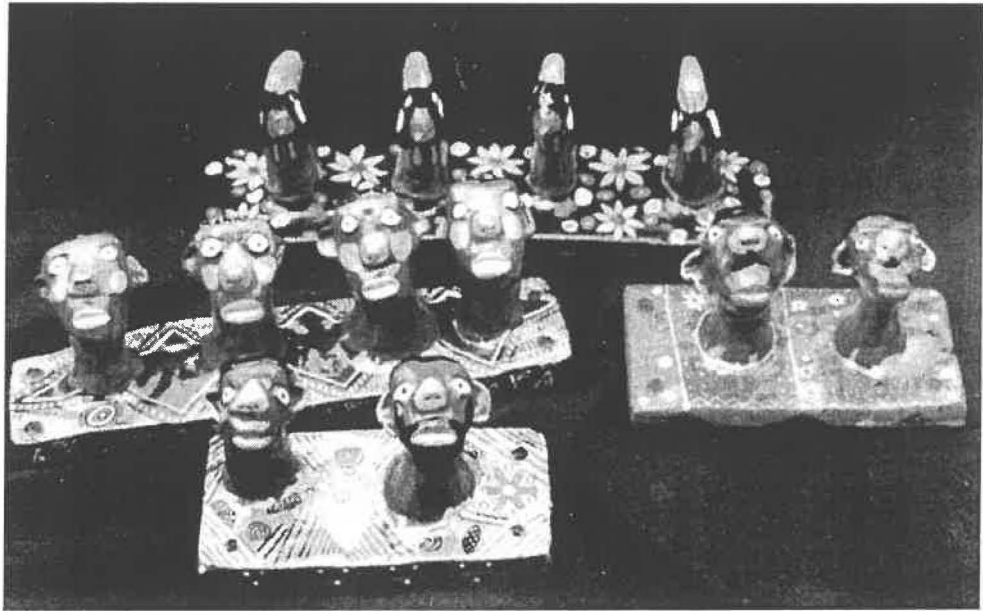


Figure 30



Figure 31



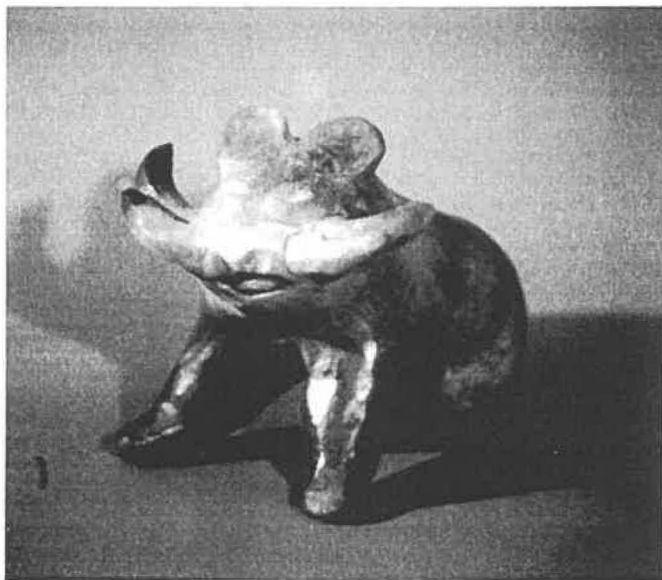
**Figure 32**



**Figure 33**



**Figure 34**



**Figure 35**





**Figure 36a and 36b**



**Figure 36c**



Figure37



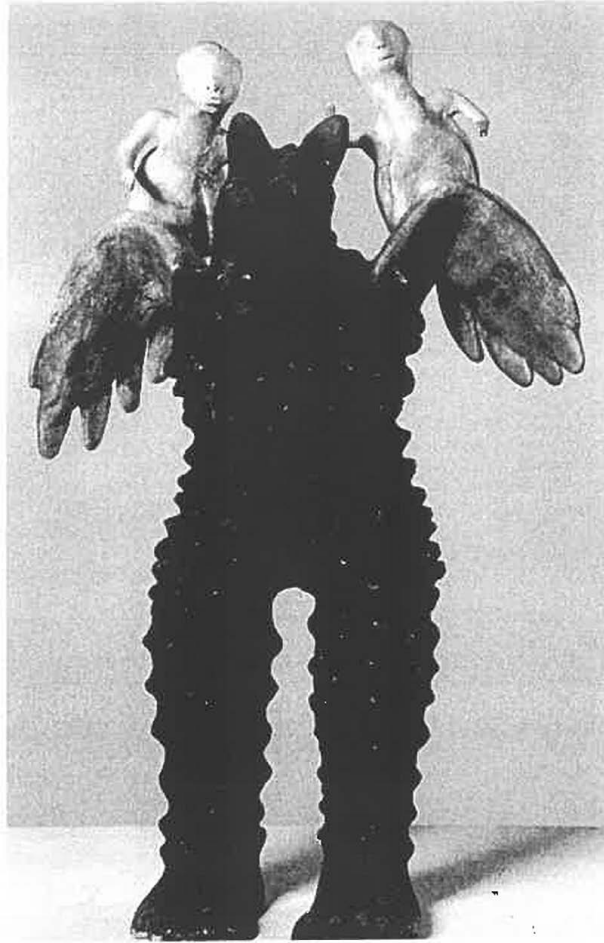
Figure 38 a and 38b





**Figure 39a and 39b**





**Figure 40**



**Figure 41 and 42**



**Figure 43**



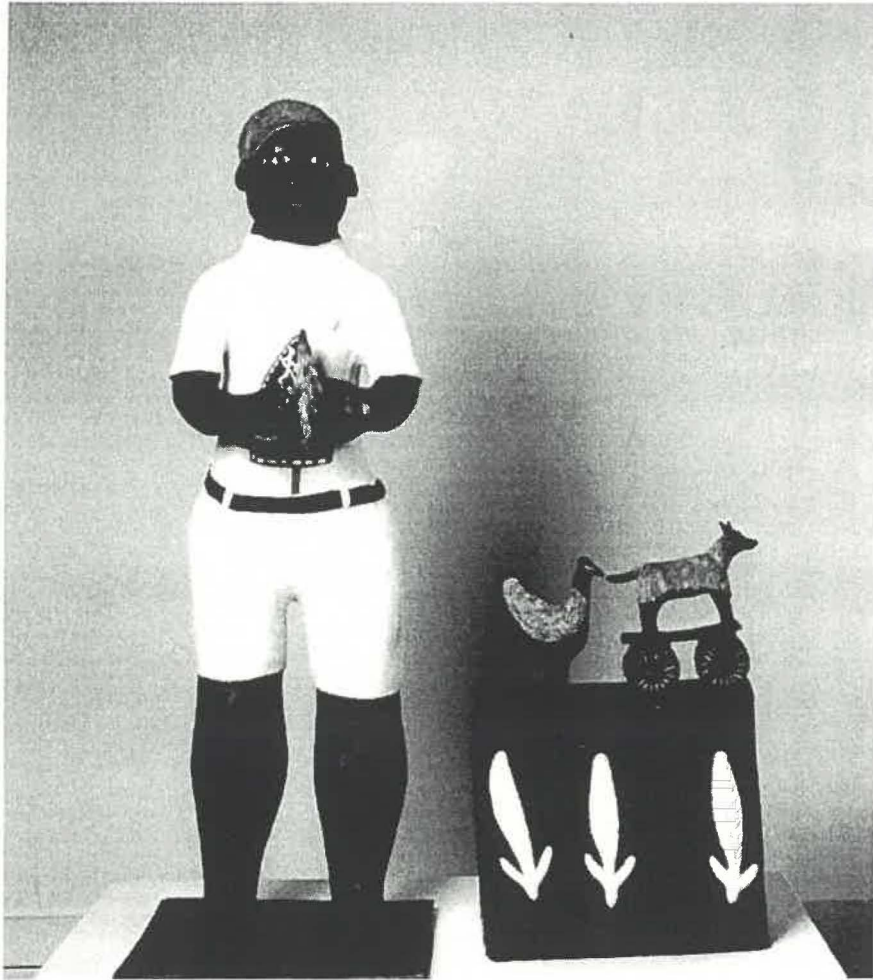


Figure 44





Figure 45

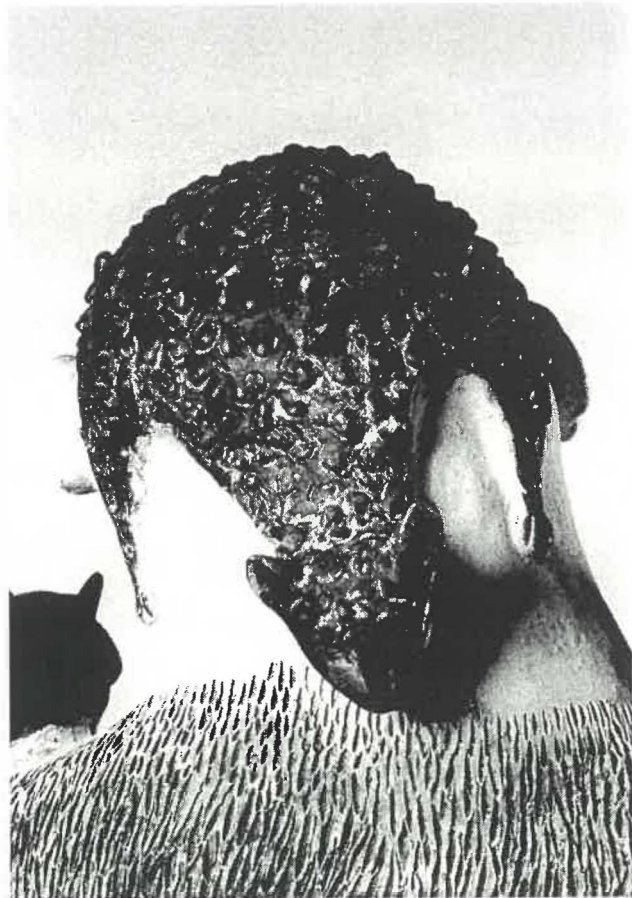


Figure 45a

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **BIOGRAPHIES OF SOME OF THE ARTISTS INVOLVED WITH THE STUDIO**

*The aim in collecting the data was to record as much biographical information of artists who are working or have worked at the studio as possible. The information does not include all the artists that have ever worked at the studio, and some of the artists included below have since left the studio.*

*Artists have been listed alphabetically.*

*The information was collected by myself with the assistance of Juliette Leeb-du Toit in June 1994 and updated by Ian Garrett in March 1997.*

**Ghesa, Josephine Lope Maduna**

Date of birth unknown, possibly 1958, Thabazeka, Lesotho

Orphaned, no formal schooling

Divorced, 6 children

Stayed with on the Ardmore Farm with the Ntshalintshali's but has subsequently built her own house.

Made and sold pots in Maseru and/or Free State, Grandmother was a potter.

Came to Ardmore to look for any work.

Sculptor

**Hadebe, Thole**

b.1962 in Ladysmith, brother stays in location

Std 3

Unmarried - 1 child

Learnt to weave sleeping mats and makes *ukhamba*.

(aunt teaches)

Came to Ardmore in 1993

Previously employed in Greytown planting trees (forestry).

Handbuilder - bowls, animal handles

**Hadebe, Khombephi Paulina Ntshalintshali**

b.1958, sister of Bonnie

Std 1

Married, 6 children

Can weave sleeping mats.

Came to the studio in 1992

Handbuilder, large, often faceted vases, bowls and jugs with applied animals, usually fish.

**Hadebe, Misiwe**

b.1979

Std 7

Unmarried, no children

Stays in Location

Came to Ardmore in 1994

Previous employment: none

Painter

**Jiyane, Matrinah**

1966-1996

Std 6

Married to Nhlanhla, two children

Came to the studio in April 1992.

Worked in the studio as a husband and wife team.

Tragically struck by lightening in her house in 1996.

Awards: APSA Regional Award Novice Award 1992



**Madondo, Jabu**

b.1971 in Champagne Castle area

Std 1

1 child

Learnt to make sleeping mats.

Came to Ardmore in November 1993, heard about it

Previous employment: none

Handbuilder

**Mazibuko, Octavia**

b.1973

Std 5

Unmarried, 2 children

Learnt to crochet

Came to Ardmore in 1993

Previously employed toch labourer

Handbuilder

**Mazibuko, Goodness Zenzane**

b.1972

Std 2

Unmarried, 1 child

Makes beadwork necklaces

Came to Ardmore in 1993

Worked previously as a farm labourer.

Painter

**Mazibuko, Bongi**

1974

Std 7

Married, 1 child

Learnt to crochet and can weave sleeping mats.

Came to Ardmore in February 1994

Worked previously as a toch labourer at Ardmore Farm.

Painter

**Mabaso, Promise Philile**

b.1975

Std 7

Unmarried, 1 child

Stays in Loskop

Learnt to weave grass mats.

Came to Ardmore in January 1994.

Previous employment: none

Painter

**Mdondo, Makake**

b.1974

Std 2

Unmarried, 1 child

Came to Ardmore in September 1993.

**Mkhize, Happiness Hlengewe**

b.1975

Std 9

Married, 1 child

Wants to return to school when finances permit.

Came to the studio in 1994, heard about Ardmore from Octavia.

Painter

**Mpinga, Zinhle**

b.1976

Std 8

Unmarried, 1 child

Comes from neighbouring farm.

Learnt to crochet.

Came to Ardmore in 1992.

Previous employment: none, but intends going back to school.

Painter

**Msele, Zebon Brilliant Bongane**

b.1967

Std 10, Diploma in Basic Electronics from Monitor School Correspondence College.

Came to Ardmore on July 1994, brought by a friend who saw him making clay animals (rhinos and sharks) for enjoyment.

Some members of his family weave and decorate clothes.

Sculptor, enjoys making people in action, uses stacked composition.

**Mweli, Phineus**

b.1949 at Impendle

Std 3

Married, 1 wife, 3 children

Lives on farm, but has a house in Imbali in Pietermaritzburg

Trained at David Walters Caversham Studio where he worked as an assistant.

Came to Ardmore in July 1990.

Moved to Springvale Farm in 1995.

Throws ware for Ardmore, and decorates and handbuilds.

As manager in studio, he glazes and packs and fires kilns.

**Ndlovu, Agnes Sombi**

b.1970

Std 4

Married, 2 children

Come from Champagne Castle

Learnt to weave sleeping mats.

Came to Ardmore in 1992, heard about the studio from a friend.

Previously employed at time-share in Champagne Valley.

Handbuilder: mainly teapots

**Nene, Phumelele Anna**

b.1967, Empofane, Drakensberg

Std 2

Unmarried, 3 children

Came to Ardmore in 1988, after coming to visit Bonnie in the studio.

Grandfather and brothers were wood-carvers.

Previous employment: Worked at the Nest Holiday Resort in the kitchens, at a time-share in the Champagne Valley.

Painter: favours birds

**Nene, Jabu Josephine**

b.1973, Empofane, Drakensberg

Std 5

Unmarried, 1 child

Came to Ardmore in November 1991, but was taught by Punch before coming to work at the studio.

Painter: bold symmetrical style, often uses blues and greens, enjoys painting insects.

**Nene, Zinhle**

b.1978

Std 5

Unmarried, no children

Comes from Champagne Castle.

Jabu Nene's sister

Came to Ardmore in February 1994.

Painter: delicate line, favours crocodiles and reptiles motifs.

**Ngubeni, Goodness Nomusa**

b.1965

Std 5

Married, 2 children 1965

Makes sleeping mats.

Came to Ardmore in January 1994, heard about the studio from Elizabeth.

Painter

**Ngubeni, Elizabeth**

b.1955

Std 2

Married, 6 children

Came to Ardmore February 1989.

Handbuilder: favours delicate jugs

**Ngubeni, Miriam Thabele**

b.1972, Durban

Std 7

Unmarried, 2 child

Can Weave sleeping mats.

Came to Ardmore in March 1990, heard about the studio from Bonnie.

Previous employment: none

Painter: favours zebras, work characterised by bold flowers and leaves, loose asymmetrical composition, uses a lot of pink, blue and orange.

**Ngubeni, Thabile**

b.1972

Std 6

Unmarried, 2 children

Stays in Location

Previous employment: none

Came to Ardmore in 1992.

Painter

**Nsundwane, Nhlanhla Andries**

b.1962

No formal schooling

Married to Matrinah, widowed in 1996, 2 children

Modeled clay animals (oxen) as a child.

Came to Ardmore in 1992. He heard about the studio and came there to ask for work

Sculptor, carefully modeled figurative sculptures of angels, hanging ornaments, often half-human, half animal.

Previous employment: none, had a Disability Pension since he had suffered Polio as a child.

**Ntshalintshali, Bonnie**

b.1965

Std 8

Unmarried, 1 child

Lives on the Ardmore Farm

Sews clothes

Came to Ardmore in 1985.

Previous employment: worked during school holidays as farm labourer helping with the harvesting.

Painter and sculptor

**Ntshalintshali, Osolo**

1969

Std 2

Unmarried, 1 child

Lives on Ardmore Farm.

Came to Ardmore in 1990.

Painter

**Ntshalintshali, Sindy**

1972

Std 5

Unmarried, 1 child

Lives on Ardmore Farm.

Came to Ardmore in 1987.

Painter

**Ntshalintshali, Nelly**

b.1974

Std 4

Unmarried, no children

Bonnie's sister - lives on Ardmore Farm.

Came to Ardmore in January 1994.

Previous employment: none

Painter

**Ntshalintshali, Hlengiwe**

b.1979

Std 6

Unmarried, no children

Bonnie's niece

Learnt to crochet.

Had temporary job before coming to Ardmore.

Painter

**Ntshalintshali, Isabel Nelisiwe**

b.1975

Std 4

Unmarried

Lives on Ardmore Farm.

Learnt to crochet.

Came to Ardmore in June 1993, heard about the studio from Bonnie.

Painter

**Ntshela, Gladdis**

b.1966

Std 9

Unmarried, 4 children

Stays in Loskop

Came to Ardmore in June 1993.

Previous employment: none

Painter

**Nxumalo, Otilia Nomsombuko**

b.1962 in Nxambithi, Ladysmith

Std 4

Married, 4 children

Learnt to crochet and make beadwork necklaces.

Came to Ardmore in 1989, heard about the studio from Agnes.

Previous employment: none

Painter

**Nxumalo, Wonderboy Tokozani**

b.1975

Std 6

Greytown Location

Drew at home prior to coming to Ardmore.

Came to Ardmore March 1994, brought by his mother's employer who had read about the studio in the Natal Witness.

Previous employment: none

Painter and print-maker

**Nyambe, Beatrice Kwelezele**

1964

No formal schooling

Married, 5 children

Made dolls and beadwork.

Came to Ardmore in 1991, heard about the studio from other people.

Handbuilder

**Shabalala, Mavis Dombie**

b.1965, Empofane

Std 7

Unmarried, 2 children

Lives on Ardmore Farm.

Came to Ardmore in 1989, heard about the studio from Punch, her sister.

Did some crafts at school.

Painter: enjoys painting guinea fowls, produces complex and intricate designs, with dense patterns, covers the entire surface, often uses pinks, greens, black and yellow.

**Shabalala, Punch Fortunate**

b.1969, Empofane

Std 6

Unmarried, 4 children

Stays on the Ardmore Farm.

Came to Ardmore in 1989.

Learnt to crochet and knit and can weave sleeping mats.

Previous employment: none

Painter: favours zebra's, complicated compositions with flowers and foliage designs, incorporates black with colours to give rich effects.

**Shabalala, Muntu Fakazile Beauty**

b.1966, Emaswazini

Married, 5 children

Came to Ardmore in 1986/7, heard about the studio through Bonnie.

Handbuilder: enjoys making giraffe teapots.

**Tshabul, Shume**

1961

Class 1

Married, 4 children, husband works in Johannesburg.

Came to the studio in January 1994, heard about the studio from Elizabeth

Worked previously at the Nest Hotel as a domestic.

Handbuilder: favours platters

**Xaba, Matrinah**

b.1971

Std 8

Unmarried, 3 children

Can weave sleeping mats.

Came to Ardmore in January 1994.

Worked previously at a time-share in the Champagne Valley.

Painter

**Xaba, Ntombenhle**

b.1971

Std 7

Unmarried, 3 children

Previous employment: none

Came to Ardmore in February 1994.

Painter

**Xaba, Virginia**

b.1975

Std 7

Unmarried, 1 child

Stays on Ardmore Farm.

Learnt to crochet and make grass mats.

Came to Ardmore in 1992.

Previous employment: none

Painter

**Zigalala, Thembi**

b.1965

Std 6

Married, 1 child

Came to Ardmore in June 1992, heard about the studio from Ottilia.

Pervious employed as a planter for Sappi Forests

Painter

*The following list includes artists whose biographies have not been collated, either because they have left the studio or are schoolgirls who work as apprentices during weekends and school holidays. Their names nevertheless appear on the pay-role which indicate that they were or still are associated with the studio.*

Hadebe, Xoli

Mabaso, Busie

Mazibuko, Jabu

Mathebula, Angeline

Mpinga, Goodness

Nene, Winnie

Nthsalintshali, Vuzi

Ntshalinthsali, Layekele

Shabalala, Khetiwe

Sylvia

Misiwe

Lungy

Alice



## **APPENDIX 2**

### **CIRRICULA VITAE OF FEE HALSTED-BERNING**

**BONNIE NTSHALINTSHALI**

**JOSEPHINE GHESA**

**PHINEUS MWELI**

**BEAUTY NTSHALINTSHALI**

**ELIZABETH NGUBENI**

**SINDY NTSHALINTSHALI**

**PHUMELELE NENE**

**PUNCH SHABALALA**

**MAVIS SHABALALA**

**MIRIAM NGUBENI**

**NHLANHLA NSUNDWANE**

**WONDERBOY NXUMALO**

**WRITTEN BY JOAN DORFMAN**

*(Gallery owner and printmaker from America*

*who is a friend of Halsted-Berning's.)*

# Ardmore

*Ceramic Art*

P.O. Box 1007, Mooi River, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa  
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## **Fee Halsted-Berning**

Fee Halsted-Berning was born in Zimbabwe in 1958. She completed her Fine Art degree at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg in 1983 and lectured Ceramics at the Durban Technikon the following year.

In 1985 she won the Natal Arts Trust Special Award, in 1987 the Corona del Mar Young Artist's Award, in 1988 the Corobrik Tatham Award and in 1990 the Standard Bank Young Artist Award. Her work is represented in major collections throughout South Africa, including the South African National Gallery in Capetown, the Johannesburg Art Gallery, the UNISA Art Gallery in Pretoria and the Durban Gallery as well as in private collections throughout Africa, Europe and the United States.

Halsted-Berning's sculptural work, which has been described as physical and intuitive, combines traditional ceramic techniques with painted surfaces and collage elements. Her evocative images are molded from the icons and fetishes of a Zimbabwean childhood and a colonial past. She delights, wrote South African artist Andrew Verster, in juxtaposing unlikely elements, in avoiding logic, over-refinement and politeness.

In 1985 she founded Ardmore Ceramic Art, which today represents over 45 Zulu and Sotho Artists. Fee Halsted-Berning lives in the KwaZulu Natal Midlands with her husband James and their three children.

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## **Bonnie Ntshalintshali**

Bonnie Ntshalintshali was born in 1967 on Ardmore Farm in the Winterton district of KwaZulu Natal. In 1985, she apprenticed to Fee Halsted-Berning as a studio assistant. While learning basic ceramic techniques, Ntshalintshali's natural ability in both sculpture and painting was quickly recognized, and she was encouraged by Halsted-Berning to pursue her own work.

In 1988, Ntshalintshali received the Corobrik National Ceramic Award. In 1990, she won the Standard Bank Young Artist Award, jointly with Halsted-Berning. That same year, 1990, she spent a term at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg studying under Juliet Armstrong and Ian Calder.

In 1991, the Standard Bank commissioned a series of original prints from its award winning artists. Using her own sculpture as inspiration, Ntshalintshali produced a series of original silk-screens, which were shown that year at the Print Festival in Grahamstown.

Ntshalintshali constructs her complex pieces by coiling or building from solid forms. Fired to 1200 degrees, the work is then richly and meticulously decorated. Many of Ntshalintshali's sculptures draw inspiration from her early mission school education. Biblical tales are retold with simplicity and candor. A hallmark of Ntshalintshali's work is her narrative piling of elements, or vertical storytelling. Her pieces combine a strong Zulu tradition with her own imaginative response to western imagery. "Her narrative flows richly," wrote Achille Bonito Oliva, Director of the Visual Arts Section of the 1993 Venice Biennial, "There are still many stories to be told."

Bonnie Ntshalintshali's work is represented in major collections throughout South Africa including, the South African National Gallery in Cape Town, the Durban Gallery, the Tatham Gallery, Pietermaritzburg, the Johannesburg Art Gallery, the UNISA Art Gallery, Pretoria, the University of the Witwatersrand Collection, Johannesburg and in the United States at the Newark Art Gallery in Newark, New Jersey.

In 1992 she exhibited at the Seville Expo in Spain, in 1993 at the Venice Biennial in the Aperto Exhibition which traveled to Rome and Amsterdam and in 1995 at the South African Biennial in Johannesburg. Ntshalintshali's work is represented in public and private collections throughout Europe, Africa and the United States.

Bonnie Ntshalintshali is single and has one child.

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## **Bonnie Ntshalintshali**

Born 1967 on Ardmore Farm in the Winterton district of KwaZulu Natal

1985 Ntshalintshali apprenticed to Fee Halsted-Berning at Ardmore Ceramic Art Studio.

1990 Studied at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg under the tutelage of Juliet Armstrong and Ian Calder.

1993 Exhibited at the Venice Biennial, Aperto (Open Section) Exhibition, which traveled to Rome and Amsterdam.

*Ntshalintshali constructs her figures by either coiling or building from solid forms and then assembles them in tableau. The sculptures are fired to 1200 degrees and then richly and meticulously decorated.*

Collections: Corobrik Collection, Pietermaritzburg  
Durban Art Gallery  
Tatham Gallery, Pietermaritzburg  
University of the Witwatersrand  
UNISA Art Gallery, Pretoria  
South African National Gallery, Cape Town  
William Humphreys Gallery, Kimberly  
King George IV Gallery, Port Elizabeth  
Johannesburg Art Gallery  
SASOL Collection, Johannesburg  
Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg  
1820 Foundation, Grahamstown  
Carnegie Art Gallery, Newcastle  
Sandton Municipal Collection  
Department of Foreign Affairs  
Irma Stern Museum, Cape Town  
Durbanville Clay Museum, Cape Town  
SABC Collection, Johannesburg  
Natal Technikon Collection, Durban  
Newark Art Gallery, Newark, New Jersey, USA

Awards: 1988 Corobrik National Ceramic Award  
1990 Standard Bank Young Artist Award  
1993 Natal Trust Biennial Merit Award  
1997 Telkom, *Art and the Internet* Award

- Exhibitions:
- 1985 *Women Artists*, Johannesburg
  - 1986 Helen de Leeuw Gallery, Johannesburg  
*With de Morgan in Mind*, Elizabeth Gordon Gallery, Durban
  - 1987 Café Gallery, Durban  
*Figurative Ceramics*, Annex Gallery, Cape Town
  - 1988 Gallery International, Cape Town  
Corobrik National, Cape Town  
Volkskas Exhibition, Johannesburg  
*African Treasures*, Johannesburg  
*100 Artists for Life*, Elizabeth Gordon Gallery Durban  
*Clay Plus*, UNISA Gallery, Pretoria
  - 1989 Natal Arts Trust Biennial, Pietermaritzburg  
NSA (Natal Society of Arts) Gallery, Durban  
*Neglected Traditions*, Johannesburg
  - 1990 National Arts Festival, Standard Bank Award, Grahamstown  
VITA Arts Now Exhibition,
  - 1991 NSA Gallery, Durban  
*Decade of Young Artists*, Print Art Festival, Grahamstown  
Elizabeth Gordon Gallery, Durban
  - 1992 Seville Expo, Spain  
Cape Town Triennial
  - 1992-1996 Gallery on Tyrone, Johannesburg
  - 1993 Venice Biennial, Aperto (Open Section), Italy
  - 1993 Durbanville Gallery, Cape Town  
Natal Arts Trust, Pietermaritzburg
  - 1995 *Africa Earthed*, South African Biennial, Johannesburg  
*The Spirit of our Stories*, Print Exhibition, Grahamstown
  - 1996 Ceramic National, Johannesburg  
Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol, UK
  - 1997 South African National Ceramic Exhibition, Pretoria (guest Artist)  
Telkom, *Art and the Internet*, Durban (traveling exhibition)  
Vita Crafts Now Exhibition, Pretoria

- Publications:  
(selected)
- Contemporary Ceramics in South Africa*, 1991 Struik, Cape Town
  - Decade of Young Artists*, catalogue, 1991, Standard Bank, Johannesburg
  - Suid-Afrikaanse Panorama*, Maart/April 1991, Pretoria
  - Warm Journal*, vol. 8, No.2, 1987, USA
  - Ceramic Review*, No.153 May/June, 1995, London, UK
  - National Ceramics Quarterly*, No.1, winter 1987, Franschhoek
  - Arts Calendar*, vol. 18, No. 2 1993, Pretoria
  - Flying Springbok*, March 1996, Johannesburg
  - Cape Town Triennial*, Catalogue, 1991 Cape Town
  - Clay Plus*, Catalogue, 1988. *Neglected Traditions*, Catalogue, 1989
  - Ceramic Bulletin of the South African Cultural and History Museum*, 1993
  - Arte Contemporanea del Sud Aafrica*, 1993, Venezia, Italia

# Ardmore

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## **Josephine Ghesa**

Josephine Ghesa, was born in Lesotho in 1958. An orphan, Ghesa was raised by her grandmother, a traditional potter in the village of Thaba Tseka. She had no formal education when she arrived at Ardmore Ceramic Art Studio in 1990. There, under the tutelage of Fee Halsted-Berning, she was taught the basic techniques of coiling and constructing forms from clay.

Ghesa showed a pronounced aptitude for sculpture and was encouraged to pursue her own particular vision. Within six months, her clay figures were purchased by two major South African galleries.

Ghesa coils her forms using a terra-cotta clay body. The work is fired to 1200 degrees and then finished in a variety of media from oil paint to boot polish.

Unique and at times haunting, Ghesa's work, described by Chicago University Dean Carol Bekker as, "some of the strongest work I've seen", combines animal and human forms into sculptures that blend the legends of her Sotho childhood with her own highly personalized mythology.

In 1990, Ghesa won the Natal Regional Sculpture Prize and in 1993 the Natal Biennial Merit Award. In 1996, her first solo exhibition was held at the Jack Heath Gallery, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. Ghesa's work is represented in major South African collections as well as in private collections throughout Europe, Africa and the United States. Josephine Ghesa is divorced and has three children.

# Ardmore

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## Josephine Ghesa

Born in Lesotho in 1958

1990 Ghesa apprenticed to Fee Halsted-Berning at Ardmore Ceramic Art Studio,  
KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

*Ghesa coils her forms using a terra-cotta clay body. The work is fired to 1200 degrees and then finished in a variety of media from oil paint to boot polish.*

- Exhibitions: 1990 Dominicus Gallery, Johannesburg  
NSA (Natal Society of Arts) Gallery, Durban  
1991 Regional Ceramic Exhibition, Durban  
NSA Gallery, Durban  
1992-1996 Gallery on Tyrone, Johannesburg  
Regional Ceramic Exhibition, Pietermaritzburg  
1993 Regional Ceramic Exhibition, Durban  
1994 NSA Gallery, Durban  
Carnegie Gallery, Newcastle  
1995 *Africa Earthed*, South African Biennial, Johannesburg  
1996 Jack Heath Gallery, Pietermaritzburg (solo exhibition)  
1997 South African National Ceramic Exhibition, Pretoria (guest artist)
- Awards: 1990 Sculpture Prize, Regional Ceramics Exhibition, Natal  
1993 Merit Award, Natal Biennial
- Collections: Johannesburg Art Gallery  
Carnegie Gallery, Newcastle  
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg  
Tatham and Corobrik Collection, Pietermaritzburg  
South African Airways  
SASOL, Johannesburg  
Durban Gallery  
Bloemfontein National Gallery
- Publications: *Contemporary Ceramics in South Africa*, 1991, Struik, Cape Town  
*SASOL Collection*, 1995, Johannesburg

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## **Phineus Mveli**

*Phineus Mveli was born in the Natal Midlands town of Howick in 1949. He attended the Impendle School and later worked at Michael House as a builder and a painter. In 1974 he became studio assistant to potter David Walters at the Caversham Mill in Balgowan. Mveli packed oil kilns and helped with the glazing. There, in his spare time, he began to sculpt the clay oxen, animals and birds from his childhood.*

*In 1990, Phineus Mveli joined Ardmore Ceramic Art as a kiln and glaze assistant. In 1992, encouraged by Halsted-Berning, Mveli taught himself to use a potter's wheel. Now, Phineus produces all of Ardmore's thrown pieces.*

*In his own signature domestic ware, Mveli combines the thrown form with sculpted animals and birds reminiscent of the small clay figures sculpted by Zulu children.*

*The tableware for Phinda Game reserve was thrown by Mveli. In 1996, he moved with Halsted-Berning to Springvale Gallery and farm.*

## **Phineus Mveli**

Born 1949 in Howick in the Natal Midlands

1990 Phineus Mveli joined Ardmore Ceramic Art as a kiln and glaze assistant.

*Phineus Mveli produces all of Ardmore's thrown pieces. His signature domestic ware combines wheel thrown pieces with sculpted animal forms.*

Collections: Durban Gallery

Exhibitions: 1992-1996 Gallery on Tyrone, Johannesburg  
1994 NSA Gallery, Durban



## **Beauty Ntshalintshali**

Born 1966

1986 Joined Ardmore Ceramic Art as a builder and sculptor.

*All of Beauty Ntshalintshali's domestic ware is hand-coiled. Many of these pieces are painted by her sister-in-law Bonnie Ntshalintshali, whose work Beauty admires.*

Collections: Durban Gallery  
Corobrik Collection, Pietermaritzburg  
Carnegie Art Gallery, Newcastle

Awards: 1991 Functional Prize, Natal Regional Ceramic Exhibition, Durban  
1992 Contemporary Vessel, Natal Regional Ceramic Exhibition,  
Pietermaritzburg

Exhibitions: 1990 Dominicus Gallery, Johannesburg  
1990-1991 NSA Gallery, Durban  
1991-1992 Natal Regional Ceramic Exhibition, Durban and  
Pietermaritzburg  
1992-1996 Gallery on Tyrone, Johannesburg  
1994 NSA Gallery, Durban  
1997 Vita Crafts Now Exhibition, Pretoria  
South African Regional Ceramic Show, Pretoria

## **Elizabeth (Thandazile) Ngubeni**

Born 1956 in Loskop, KwaZulu Natal.

1989 Started at Ardmore Ceramic Art as a builder.

*A favorite theme of Elizabeth Ngubeni is the genet cat. She is known at Ardmore for her delicate little jugs and mugs with legs. She is married and has six children.*

Exhibitions: 1990 Dominicus Gallery, Johannesburg  
1992-1996 Gallery on Tyrone, Johannesburg

## **Sindy Ntshalintshali**

Born 1971

1989 Began painting at Ardmore Ceramic Art Studio under Fee Halsted-Berning. Sindy Ntshalintshali now works from her Table Mountain home in KwaZulu Natal, bringing her work to the studio every month.

*Sindy Ntshalintshali's painterly style of decoration is saturated with vibrant colour and bold animal and plant designs.*

Collections: Carnegie Art Gallery, Newcastle  
SASOL Collection, Johannesburg

Exhibitions: 1990 Dominicus Gallery, Johannesburg  
1990-1991 NSA Gallery, Durban  
1991 Natal Regional Ceramic Exhibition, Durban  
1992 *The Natal Route*, Ferguson Fine Art, Johannesburg  
1992-1996 Gallery on Tyrone, Johannesburg

## **Phumelele Nene**

Born 1967 in the Winterton area of KwaZulu Natal.

1988 Apprenticed to Fee Halsted-Berning at Ardmore Ceramic Art Studio.

*Nene's distinctive domestic ware often favours large, bold flowers and animals on a stark white ground. Highly skilled, Phumelele sculpts and paints her own ornamental pieces.*

Collections: Durban Art gallery  
Corobrik and Tatham Collections, Pietermaritzburg  
Carnegie Art Gallery, Newcastle

Awards: 1991 Functional Prize, Natal Regional Ceramic Exhibition, Durban  
1992 Contemporary Vessel, Natal Regional Ceramic Exhibition, Pietermaritzburg

Exhibitions: 1990 Dominicus Gallery, Johannesburg  
1990-1991 NSA Gallery, Durban  
Natal Regional Ceramic Exhibition, Durban and Pietermaritzburg  
1992 *The Natal Route*, Ferguson Fine Art, Johannesburg  
1992-1996 Gallery on Tyrone, Johannesburg  
1993 RAU Regional Ceramic Exhibition, Johannesburg  
1994 NSA Gallery, Durban  
1997 South African National Ceramic Show, Pretoria (guest artist)

# Ardmore

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## Ardmore Artists *Painters and Builders*

### **Punch Shabalala**

*Punch Shabalala was born in 1967 on Ardmore Farm in KwaZulu Natal. Shabalala had no formal art training when she began work at Ardmore as a painter. Inspired by the other artist around her, she soon developed a personal decorative style. Her obsessive attention to detail and intricate patterning have been described by Halsted-Berning as "Persian in feeling". Punch Shabalala is well known for her decorative plates and fanciful birds.*

### **Punch Shabalala**

Born 1967 on Ardmore Farm in KwaZulu Natal

1989 Started work as a painter at Ardmore Ceramic Art under Fee Halsted-Berning.

Collections: Durban Art Gallery  
SASOL Collection  
Corobrik Collection, Pietermaritzburg  
Tatham Art Gallery, Pietermaritzburg  
Johannesburg Art Gallery

Awards: 1991 Functional Prize, Natal Regional Ceramic Exhibition  
1992 Contemporary Vessel, Natal Regional Ceramic Exhibition

Exhibitions: 1990 Dominicus Gallery, Johannesburg  
1990-1991 NSA (Natal Society of Arts) Exhibition, Durban  
1991 Natal Regional Ceramic Exhibition, Durban  
1992 Natal Regional Ceramic Exhibition, Pietermaritzburg  
1992-1996 Gallery on Tyrone, Johannesburg  
1993 RAU Regional Ceramic Exhibition, Johannesburg  
1994 NSA Exhibition, Durban  
1995 *Africa Earthed*, South African Biennial, Johannesburg  
1995 *The Spirit of our Stories*, Print Exhibition, Grahamstown  
1997 Vita Crafts Now Exhibition, Pretoria  
1997 South African National Ceramic Show, Pretoria (guest artist)

Publications: *Contemporary Ceramics in South Africa*. 1991, Struik. Cape Town

## **Mavis Shabalala**

*Mavis Shabalala was born in 1965 on Ardmore Farm. In 1995, she joined her sister Punch Shabalala at Ardmore and began painting clay pieces under the tutelage of Fee Halsted-Berning. Mavis Shabalala's painting style is highly decorative and filled with energy. Reminiscent of traditional African Kente cloth, her pieces are covered by detailed chevron and vibrant bead-like patterns.*

## **Mavis Shabalala**

Born on Ardmore Farm in 1965

1989 Began painting at the Ardmore Ceramic Art Studio under Fee Halsted-Berning.

Collections: Durban Art Gallery  
University of the Witwatersrand  
Corobrik Collection, Pietermaritzburg

Exhibitions: 1990 Dominicus Gallery, Johannesburg  
1992 Volkskas Exhibition, Durban  
*The Natal Route*, Ferguson fine Art, Johannesburg  
1992-1996 Gallery on Tyrone, Johannesburg  
1994 NSA (Natal Society of Arts) Exhibition, Durban  
Carnegie Gallery, Newcastle  
1995 *The Spirit of our Stories*, Print Exhibition, Grahamstown  
1997 Vita Crafts Now Exhibition, Pretoria  
South African National Ceramic Show, Pretoria (guest artist)

## **Miriam Ngubeni**

Born 1969

1989 Apprenticed to Fee Halsted-Berning as a painter

*Miriam Ngubeni decorates her vessels with delicate, pastel coloured floral and paisley designs.*

Collections: Durban Gallery

Exhibitions: 1992-1996 Gallery on Tyrone, Johannesburg  
1994 NSA Gallery, Durban  
Carnegie Art Gallery, Newcastle  
1995 *Africa Earthed*, South African Biennial, Johannesburg

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## **Nhlanhla Nsundwane**

Nhlanhla Nsundwane was born in 1962. As a small child he modeled clay oxen and developed a love and sensitivity for the sculptural form. He had no formal education or art training when he and his wife, Matrina Jiyane came to Ardmore Ceramic Art in 1992. Encouraged by Halsted-Berning, they set up a partnership and worked together--he modeled and she painted. Matrina Jiyane left the studio in 1994 to have a child. She was struck by lightning in her home and died, January, 1997.

Nhlanhla is a slight man with immense sculptural ability. His witty and strong narrative pieces are influenced by Staffordshire portrait figures. In 1992, six months after his arrival at Ardmore, he won the Novice Prize at the Natal Regional Ceramic Exhibition in Pietermaritzburg. His work is represented in the Tatham Collection, Pietermaritzburg.

## **Nhlanha Nsundwana**

Born 1962 in the Winterton district of KwaZulu Natal

1992 Arrived at Ardmore Ceramic Art to work with Fee Halsted-Berning.

*Nhlanha Nsundwana models and sculpts from solid forms. His figurative, narrative pieces are then fired to 1200 degrees and finished in a variety of ceramic and painterly techniques.*

Collections: Tatham gallery, Pietermaritzburg

Awards: 1992 Novice Prize, Natal Regional Ceramic Exhibition,  
Pietermaritzburg

Exhibitions: 1992 Natal Regional Ceramic Exhibition, Pietermaritzburg  
1992-1996 Gallery on Tyrone  
1996 Natal Biennial, Pietermaritzburg

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## **Wonderboy (Thokozani) Nxumalo**

Wonderboy Nxumalo was born in Greytown in 1975. He grew up on the Royden-Turner farm and attended Candabuthule high school. Wonderboys' love of story and natural drawing ability led him to Fee Halsted-Berning and Ardmore Ceramic Art where he began his apprenticeship in 1994.

Inspired by the work of African artist, John Muafangejo and encouraged by Halsted-Berning, Wonderboy began to put his drawings and poetry onto clay. Predominately black and white, these early pieces combined Nxumalo's heartfelt poetry with images of people and animals in harmony with nature. Influenced by the spiritual dimension of Rastafarian culture, Nxumalo's work, *Jah*, was purchased, in 1996, by the UNISA Collection in Pretoria.

He 1995, sponsored by the Caversham Press and Educational Trust, he studied printmaking under Malcolm Christian. Along with other Ardmore artists, Wonderboy produced work that was exhibited at the Grahamstown Print Art Festival in 1996. This exhibition, *The Spirit of our Stories*, traveled throughout South Africa.

Nxumalo incorporates an intaglio technique into much of his ceramic work by first applying, to certain areas, a black ground and then scratching delicately through to expose the white clay body. A true storyteller, Wonderboy Nxumalo uses the clay surface as a vehicle for his intense, highly personalized and often quirky narratives.

In 1996, Wonderboy moved with Halsted-Berning to Springvale where he works closely with potter Phineus Mweliso creating lyrical domestic ware and unique sculptural objects.

## **Wonderboy (Thokozani) Nxumalo**

Born, 1975 in Greytown, KwaZulu Natal.

1994 Apprenticed with Fee Halsted-Berning at Ardmore Ceramic Art.

*Wonderboy Nxumalo's sophisticated graphic style combines words and pictures into an often quirky narrative. He incorporates an intaglio technique in his ceramic pieces by first applying a black ground and then scratching the surface to expose the white clay body.*

Collections: UNISA Collection, Pretoria

Exhibitions: 1994-1996 Gallery on Tyrone, Johannesburg  
1996 NSA Gallery, Durban (solo exhibition)

**APPENDIX 3**

**INTERVIEW WITH FEE HALSTED-BERNING  
IN JUNE 1994**

*INTERVIEW WITH FÉE HALSTED-BERNING*

*ON 15 JUNE 1994*

*BY JULIETTE LEEB DU TOIT AND GLENDA MENTIS*

**INTERVIEWER :** The first thing I wanted to know is what your.....

.....

**FÉE :** Well I'd say we start with Zimbabwe, growing up with baskets, Ndebele baskets, Shona stone sculpture, batonka stools, a lot of axes, weapons, tools.  
Always collecting things on the way to Umfolozi, little African things, rhino, things like that.  
You know, obviously the more you study, the more you become aware of African Art.  
I think David Middlebrook made me more aware of it in terms of collecting it.  
He introduced me to masks. I think a lot of his work was based on masks. I bought this in Cape Town and then I just continued from there, you sort of start an interest in things like that.  
I think my interest in the frame thing has always hankered on things like these stools, a lot of Bonnie's ideas especially the Moses piece. We were trying to get bigger and the wedding cake idea, the tiering. I remember when she made the Noah piece, we got halfway and it was getting so big, I said hang on Bonnie, by the time we put that in the kiln, the weight as I pick that up, its going to break. So we built it in the kiln and we couldn't get bigger than that. So then the wedding cake idea came of making plinths and wedding cakes and stacking and that made a lot of sense, for firing and packing.  
Then the idea of the Batonka stools, and you know you're always doing things like that to sort of get a bigger one and then even the head sitting on one. So it became a nice idea for a plinth and then of course I used one in my little ivory pieces. That was a way of getting out the frame, I used that as a projection. I actually made a Batonka stool in clay and then put the elephant on, so it was a projection thing.  
But very much Irma Stern, Zanibar Doors.  
I always love that sort of textured thing and of course Zimbabwe Ruins, you know, chevrons and what have you.  
More visual I would say, because we never really did African Art in art history at all.  
Then you just start relating to things. I always liked that



Yoruba painted mask. It started appealing to me far more than the plain sort of wooden art, and then you just start buying African Art books and looking, and the idea for Adam and Eve came from those Yoruba wooden things to get bigger.

You know so from that point of view I've influenced Bonnie a lot, in the sort of more technical way of how to arrive at something and then feeding her that and she would just develop from there, and then of course into my frames you can see all the time that sort of wood. I think even the use of boot polish is a sort of hankering for wood carving, and not having the ability or being a very immediate worker, clay is far quicker and easier to create that sort of affect, than sitting and carving.

Even this plate, is that whole sort of wood frame type of thing in carving.

**INTERVIEWER :** .....

**FEÈ :** Yes definitely. That definitely came from the Colonial background and living with Zebra skins and trophy heads.

**INTERVIEWER :** In the 70's.....

**FEÈ :** You know there is even little feathers, when I was painting those big ..... paintings. I think Linda, Mike Taylor's wife, started that whole thing. Remember that very decorative work she used to do. The nicest were the snakeskin boots and the little waistcoats.  
That decorative aspect definitely came from Linda, and then you sort of hark back to things....., fish scales, and then that whole snake series. And it wasn't really in fashion then. It then sort of continued and we always had porcupine quills. I lived with that stuff, tortoise shells. And its just really continued. I think it started off with that. It started more with textures, just animal colouring and that. But in the women's work, how the giraffe and zebra sort of continued.

**INTERVIEWER :** And also the very design.....

**FEÈ :** I think a lot of their beading comes through there. If you look there is so much dotting, very much beading.

**INTERVIEWER :** In the studio, who is contributing to the innovations of new shapes?

**FEÈ :** Beatrice, definitely.  
More square shapes.  
Beauty is round, very round. All her things are very round.

**INTERVIEWER :** She's.....

I was thinking before she came here.

**FEÈ** : I don't know. She comes from Stoffel's farm and she worked for me, then she had a baby. She brought a woman called Anna. Anna was very good as well. And then Beatrice sort of changed the round shape of Beauty into more hexagonal shapes.  
I will show you some of her work. And definitely Nlhanlha's shapes.

**INTERVIEWER** : Do these influence other makers?

**FEÈ** : Yes definitely and Elizabeth as well.  
Elizabeth's work is very much more delicate. You know finer. She could almost work with porcelain, and Elizabeth started introducing the little leaf with the scratching into it and that sort of wiggly edge, and really good shapes.  
So I would say Elizabeth, Beatrice, Beauty. Paulina's sort of mixed, she's never been I would say an innovator or talented. She sort of borrowed there and she makes some quite bad things and then suddenly she will come up with a nice formal shape, but it is more, I think just following the others.  
Then the others at the moment are very young sort of builders that are really following Elizabeth's style. They haven't really developed anything of their own.

**INTERVIEWER** : Do you see that edge that they're developing?

**FEÈ** : That's from Elizabeth.

**INTERVIEWER** : I think it's definitely been adopted by them.

**FEÈ** : So I would say Beauty. Well she was one of the initial starters, and everything had a very Bonnie, very round shape, and then Beatrice started going angular.

**INTERVIEWER** : What sort of functional stuff does Josephine make?  
What did she used to make.

**FEÈ** : She used to make some pots. Whatever she made was quite bad. Quite crude.  
Phineas of course, you know, is a builder as well as a painter, but of course he's throwing and that. He is quite innovative, old Phineas. He is always looking in books and pictures and then they pick up things from there.  
But he tends, like now, every casserole, elephant, monkey, zebra, elephant, monkey, zebra. And I was thinking about his work the other day, and thinking he could actually start introducing foliage and even some more of that sort onto his big casseroles. He tends to work a bit too quickly.

And even his handles. I've got to keep him on his toes because they're just like a horrible sausage put on as a handle, and I was showing him in the latest craft thing that came around, Ceramic Monthly, with lovely handles, and he got quite excited again.

You've got to keep on showing him. He's not really an innovator.

He will sort of borrow the little bird thing and then do it his way.

You know the little animals are quite neat and sort of, what I call netsuki, just got that little round form.

That works quite well, whereas some of the women get very intricate. They're very typical male and female.

You know women tend to sort of pay more attention to detail, whereas men like to sort of generalise.

**INTERVIEWER :** But is his influence more.....

**FEÈ :** Very much so. Its more management than innovative. You know when you don't find butter dishes. He harps back a lot to Taffy's throwing. He used to make a round butter dish. You know and some of the shapes, he tends to really enjoy more potters shapes. I think that there is just a lot of memory from Taffy and you get sort of potters shapes, and I'm always sort of showing him ..... and changing form and he's enjoying that. So he's great..... Now Beauty the other day was trying to make a very big form and it was very shallow, that shape with the zebra on, and she just couldn't get it. She just couldn't understand the short small rim, up and out, and also handling that was very difficult, because you had a narrow base and then this huge expanse that way, and it kept flopping, and so I said to Phineas, we've got to throw this because you can turn that bottom, and that worked. So we finding things now that a lot of shapes that we want to sort of try and arrive at is much more practical to do on the wheel.

**INTERVIEWER :** Hand building side of things?

**FEÈ :** He's definitely borrowed the little animal handle idea from them. If I can just go back to this African Art thing, when David arrived in the studio, I actually wasn't there and I had all my snakeskin drawings out and he immediately related, he definitely gave me a big confidence to stick with that thing. He made me very much aware that there were so many students making art that aspired to Europe and I was really the only student there that was concerned with my own country, my own flora and fauna. And that's what he related to as an outsider coming in. You know there're lots of Chagall paintings and Kandinsky paintings and Impressionists paintings and that very colourful was more of concern whereas he said that I was the only one that was really dealing with parts of Africa and that gave me a nice confidence and to stick with it. Boetie (Anries Botha) sort of sat down with me one day and he

said you don't realise that your background that you actually had in Zimbabwe, that Colonial sort of lifestyle, is a very rare lifestyle, and he said you must actually look back at it, and you can now that you are living here, you can look back at it in quite a detached way, and that also sort of helped me see that it was fine to sort of make statements about it.

Then I got excited about my new life as well.

Again that gave me the confidence to just make things about, as I sort of said in one of my talks in Grahamstown, I cannot make pictures about violence and those sort of things.

I'm a privileged white.

That's my reality, but I know what a guinea fowl smells like. Its blue. I've come from that whole shooting, hunting sort of thing, and I understand that, so I can create that emotion. I know

.....  
So that's what I must express. I can't sort of make pseudo pictures of anything.

**INTERVIEWER :** Going back to Phinea's work and asking what is his role in the studio?

**FEÈ :** Definitely a father figure, especially with a lot of the younger people that arrive, like Wonderboy, where he has become sort of a mentor to him and takes them under his wing  
In terms of the kiln, firing. He likes his position of authority. He likes the position of being in charge of the key, opening up the studio. Now that the two girls, Bronwyn and Maria have arrived, areas of stocktaking, I tried to get them to do that, their own stocktaking, responsible for their own cupboards and their own work. I would get 67 written in every day, meanwhile there were 50.  
They were doing their job but there was no comprehension of really what they were doing.  
It wasn't quick and efficient. They didn't understand that was the system, and that is where Maria and Bronwyn have just taken over. Then I sort of got Phineas involved. It is quite a difficult position because I would complain to Phineas about things like this and he would take it quite personally, that the stuff was missing, and he was responsible and a little bit of accusation. I think he felt there was a bit of accusation from my part.  
But you've got to work through.  
Sometimes there is a little bit of difficulty on his part, because he gets paid a retainer which is for his time spent packing the kiln, supervising packing, where its got to go to, Johannesburg, and he doesn't write which is also a big problem for me.  
So I can't say Phineas invoice that, but he can pack that. So then he feels a little bit sort of helpless because I say Maria you do the writing and Phineas you do the packing.  
So its a little bit like, I'm the boss, but I cannot actually achieve that, because I can't write up the invoice.

So I'm actually just the packer. I think there is a little bit of that happening.

By him doing his painting and his making, since he started throwing, he's had a better sort of feeling of confidence, that he is in charge. He can do something that nobody else can do, and I keep referring to him as the manager and that sort of status is very important to him. I think having worked with Taffy and that, he's had this sort of status that he is a bit older, more mature, married man, and he likes that sort of authority. Its worked very well with the women because in their culture, they relate to a man.

Its just sometimes my problem as a woman giving authority to him. It gets a little bit tricky sometimes, and you know sometimes we have a sort of a job description thing where I get quite angry with him because if I am paying him a retainer, its not just the matter of work. There are fulfillments that he's got to stop and put down tools and do what I've asked him to do.

Never there, never unpacking the kilns. I think Maria actually unpacked a kiln, he was away, and she unpacked it for him and when he got back he was very angry with her for unpacking the kiln, because there is quite a lot of responsibility, and if he's put two pieces together and they've touched, he's the one who says he's watched this.

The responsibility is on Phineas. Like now this ..... a bit under fired and he knows that there is quite a lot of damage to that ware and its reduced in price now.

So he has his pressure where he's got to watch and he's got to be very careful, but sometimes he tries to ..... a stupid sort of job description, that when he started I said listen, my cars need cleaning and the cars take the ware and its got to be looked after, would you do the cleaning of the cars and he said yes, that was fine, but it does take up time. At the beginning of the year he came to me and he said that he didn't want to clean the cars anymore. I said well that's fine, but I've got to employ somebody to do that now, so your retainer will be reduced by R50,00 or whatever it was.

He was very upset about that and a bit angry with me, and he says no he will do the cars, but now its a bit beneath him. He sort of felt his job is more a manager. I think that is what he was trying, but sometimes with communication, you don't get the right .....

Then when Wonderboy came to work with me. He said for Wonderboy to earn a little bit more money, could I pay Wonderboy the R50,00 and do the cars.

Its actually status, that's what its about. And I said to him that's absolutely fine, but where I want you to take over is the other areas like the signs, there is just supervision, you don't have to do it, but if there is a sign to be put up or if its hanging down or the fence is broken, because there is a lot to do in this studio, people that drive up to the studio, papers all outside, cobwebs everywhere.

I said I am going to give you a small role, you don't have to do it, you've got to manage it. And if there are papers outside, you see to it

that they are picked up.

Its dreadful when customers arrive and there's bits of plastic hanging outside and the signs are all fallen down and I'm going to put that responsibility on you.

And before I went away at Easter. I said to him those signs have to be put up, the fences are all broken, see to it that its done. I came back and it hadn't been done and I went off the handle with him and said listen if I'm paying you a salary I expect the job to be done.

And he said.....

I said I don't care. You're to see to it that its done. And he was very angry with me and he spent the whole day fixing and after he came back and said, "I want you to come and tell me if this job is good enough, and if its not good enough, I'm leaving." I said, well that's absolutely fine. There again its male, female. Its taking instruction from a woman. He's a man, he's an older man and that is the biggest problem with Zulu culture. I've only found one man that will work with me. The women are fine. And Llandla is no problem, because he's a "man", because of his polio, he's not considered a man.

Although he is man, there is a different aspect, he will accept criticism and that.

It is a little bit of that with Phineas, but it works out well and I think he just over extends himself, you know he's got a wife. He works like a dog for her, he pays the rent and pays off the furniture and he doesn't have anything for himself. But that's his decision. In a way its been interesting because of his economics and by giving him the incentive that we give, half of what he makes, that he's got the incentive to work. I mean he's there on weekends, he's there after 5.00, he's here before 9.00 in the morning.

**INTERVIEWER :** He seems very prolific.

**FEÈ :** Oh yes, very much. He works. I just get a bit angry with him.

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And I said for the amount of money you spend, you could have added on to your house, because I've told him that she could come up here and live with us and bring the children and he could have extended onto his house, and he could have had a mansion, for the R40 000,00 that he's paying off on his house in Imbali.

**INTERVIEWER :** But it's status though as well.

**FEÈ :** This is it. This is Phineas's problem. He's reached that age where he sort of feels that he's got to have that. Definitely with the car cleaning, all those things, and I realise it and try and work through it. And then he also gave me a big lecture that I wasn't to bring up that he was being paid to do that. He prefer me to say, can I help. You see now, its again, its respecting, he would far

rather say that he's not working for me, he's helping me. It's a male thing. You know he doesn't like to think I'm a woman and he's working for me. He doesn't like that. So I have slowly started to learn that little problem and work with it. It's more discussion now.  
Not as a labourer to a boss.

**INTERVIEWER :** As regards, as around the studio, does he go around and egg people on?

**FEÈ :** Oh yes. Orders. This is where he is very good. I would say, listen we've got orders for this and an order for that and platters, please make sure they're made. He would say, Beauty, we need one of those platters with zebra's on. Because that's so much time for me to go around, and they don't like doing orders, they really don't like order making. They prefer being free and doing what they want. It is quite tricky. Five months down the line, the order is still not done, and you say where is that order.  
And its becoming a bit tricky with the painters too, they just like to work at their own pace and explore. Economically that is my money to pay them. With the orders, you've got the money in your hand.  
As long as its getting to a stage where we can actually start saying that we are not doing orders anymore and I as a artist understand that concept. I understand that you can't always produce.  
Now we're not making anymore sort of tiered .....  
anymore, because of that whole sort of thing.  
Bonnie is not really one to sort of make sculptures.

**INTERVIEWER :** I see she is painting other people's stuff.

**FEÈ :** And yet she is picking things, which is quite interesting. Now that rose bowl. She normally sticks with Beauty's things. I think Beauty has followed quite a lot of Bonnie's sort of style and if you look at that, there is that rose pattern, all around, which she is doing, which is Bonnie's motif.  
If you look at that teapot that Beauty actually made, you could easily ..... because of the birds and the flowers. It is very much a Bonnie thing.  
Beauty works very much in a Bonnie-vane.

**INTERVIEWER :** When you first moved here, you were from Durban Tech. You were making pipes and things, for exhibitions.

**FEÈ :** .....  
We were under pressure to finish some work.

I had that exhibition on pipes. Literally I was angry. I had been retrenched and they asked me to go, and once they got me in there, and because the Ceramic Department was so collapsed and they told me what a wonderful lecturer I was and Hennie Stoebel had sort of flourished through

that and I was just hurt. It was very much an attitude. I would show them what a teacher I am. That was the anger that came out.

I didn't know whether to go back to Zimbabwe you see and I was going out with James and he said no and I said well I'm going to teach the locals.

Where do you start?

I said to Janet. Send me someone. And literally we started with those guinea fowls of mine and candlesticks. But it wasn't because I needed help, I had no exhibition on the go, I was a lost soul, angry. I was hurt.

**INTERVIEWER :** Coming back to that Tech thing, who was teaching there at that time?

**FEE :** Hugh Botha and Carol Haywood were teaching there and Carol had left to have a baby.

Boetie came to me and he said to me I want you to apply for this post. But I said I don't know anything about glazing, throwing work. He said that Botha is there to do that. I want someone with idea. I want someone with sculpture work and he made me sign on and apply, and I got the post, and it was just bureaucratic sort of thing. Women were retrenched and all local staff. I had done six months. I had started the new year and Herman du Toit said you are getting a permanent post and I was living in James's sister's back shed, because I did not want to go and get a flat and phones if it was going to be a temporary thing. Then they said its definitely permanent. I had just moved into a flat and I walked into Tech the one morning and he called me to his office and said, I'm very sorry, but you are retrenched.

**INTERVIEWER :** Then they closed.

**FEE :** It was a problem with the ceramics at the Tech in that it was part of design, it wasn't part of fine arts. It had sort of been thrown into fine art and there wasn't really a place for it, there was a separate history of art, history of ceramics and with very much more production orientated, casts, molds, things like that. So I think it actually had to go through that collapse to sort of be fitted into fine art. It is sort of a sub section of sculpture. So it was really a total waste of time.

**INTERVIEWER :** Did you come straight up here?

**FEE :** Yes, then I came up here.

James was living here, farming, and I used to commute on weekends. Not being married, I had to make some money, and it was really out of necessity.

And having worked at Taffy's. It has given me that confidence again.

**INTERVIEWER :** And then did you sell at Caversham?

**FEE :** Yes. It just started here. Really exhibition and not really selling from



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It was just Bonnie and I and then Osola came to help Bonnie paint and then neighbours, then friends at school, they came and watched and Osola, Mavis and a few others and that is literally how I learnt glazing.

**INTERVIEWER :** Did you ask someone to help you?

**FEÈ :** Just really to teach. I said to Janet, don't you have anyone else to learn with you, and clean the studio and kept it tidy and wash the brushes. That was Bonnie, and I started her on R35,00 a month. I said all right, I will teach you, but all I can afford to pay you is R35,00.

**INTERVIEWER :** Then what did she start making?

**FEÈ :** Candlesticks. Her candlesticks. She did a lot of drawings. And then started with the bird candlesticks.

**INTERVIEWER :** And they were functional?

**FEÈ :** Yes, in terms of candlestick function, but painted, so they were very fragile. They used to break. Then they amalgamated into those bigger animals.

**INTERVIEWER :** Did you have a kiln then?

**FEÈ :** Yes, again bought the wrong kiln, a potters kiln. It was literally trial and error and then techniques just came out of necessity. You just learn to get clever.

**INTERVIEWER :** In the Little Standard Bank Young Artists Award Catalogue, Andrew Verster said something about Bonnie being quite innovative with her techniques.

He said she's got startling originality. Can you elaborate on that?

**FEÈ :** Well you must remember that ceramic was a whole big break and I had already started doing it by using glue. We used to get rejected from all the ceramic shops. We were not accepted.

There was the fact that we weren't using ceramic glazes.  
So this is a big, big break for ceramics, that's got accepted, then slowly, so I got bitter about that and said that I was going to enter on the Art Show.

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And then when we started getting on the Triennale shows, then APSA decided to take notice of this because it is ceramics. It was suddenly like they were proud of it. Then they asked me to re-join

again and to exhibit again. Then Bonnie won the Corobrik.....  
There was a lot of upset about that. They really felt that ceramics  
should stick to the ceramics. Then they started introducing  
categories of sculpture and all those functional and non-functional and  
then we confused them again, because we would bring on glazed  
things, like those Staffordshire vase things that were functional, and I  
of course put them all on the functional section because they were  
glazed and functional. Then they say no, this is a contemporary  
vessel.

**INTERVIEWER :** So in actual fact, you were probably one of the first people to break  
away from the traditional ceramic techniques.

**FEÈ :** I think so. Those were the issues we were taught in painting. It wasn't  
a matter of how much oil paint you put on. It was an idea. We had  
moss growing out of things. There were wax things. It was idea that  
came first and content, not technique.  
Then you had the Ceramic Department. Suddenly there was a change.  
It was suddenly how nice the glaze fitted and I couldn't relate to that.  
So you end up with a lot of broken things, that's considered now a  
failure, you don't exhibit a cracked broken piece and from there I  
started glueing and making something sculptured. Sort of glueing and  
sticking and then getting clever. That was my fun of finding. They  
were ceramic, those garden bricks and sticking all the bits and painting  
on top of that. They get confused. What is this? It is ceramic  
but bits of paint came in. That's were David came in. It was the end  
of term of that Advanced Diploma, and before he left he said to  
me, you're not going to get a first. But I'm telling you right now, you're  
going to get somewhere in ceramics, and I forgot about that.

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Again, how do you really handle this? The work wasn't really end  
result. It was more pieces and idea. There was no really end piece.

It was only sort of later, if you really think about it, we are the only  
ceramist to have won a Standard Bank Award. No other ceramist  
has won a Standard Bank Award. Bonnie was the only ceramic work on the  
Biennale.

**INTERVIEWER :** Then being accepted into the final category which doesn't consider  
that its ceramic or anything, its just conceptive. This also made the  
perspectives of art current. Reassessing of the criteria.....

**FEÈ :** Can you think of any other ceramist that.....  
I mean I don't want to be blasé because I have big problems in all the  
areas, but why in the ceramic shows, do they have all these funny  
categories of functional and non-functional.

**INTERVIEWER :** .....

**FEÈ** : You know having being put into sculptured categories and not fitting in, and now with making the glazing work you now have Staffordshire vases and teapot, and you put into contemporary vessels.

**INTERVIEWER** : I read an article. The chap who wrote it was saying if you're going to compete in the art world you must either compete fully in the art world and go for the sculpture and make installations and get involved in what is happening, otherwise you must make craft ceramics. There's nothing wrong with that.

**FEÈ** : Which is fair. You can't judge a good pot.

**INTERVIEWER** : Those are functional pieces that you make.

**FEÈ** : Then why do they put them into this vessel job.

**INTERVIEWER** : Because then people running APSA .....

**INTERVIEWER** : We've covered Fee and the studio as it grew. It has increased in scope size. Have you considered a cut-off point? You get people in and you lose some.

**FEÈ** : We lose them the whole time. Actually I drew a line the other day. I was looking at the wage books and just the logistics, I thought, am I being able to afford to keep these people and survive. So I said to Phineas, I think .....

**INTERVIEWER** : That is determined then financially, size of the studio.

**FEÈ** : Size of studio. Beatrice has gone to have a baby. Nhlanhla's wife has gone. She hasn't come back for 2 years. This is what happens. You train those people up, they disappear. You see a gap in your studio and start training new ones. Then the old ones come back. Suddenly they pitch up. Josephine disappeared for 2 years, then she pitched up. They disappear all the time. Like Pinky now, her sister has had a baby, so Pinky's the other sister, so she must go and work for that family. So now I've lost Pinky. She's still on the wage roll but her salary is a minimal thing.

When you've got a nice person and a good worker, suddenly when they disappear and reappear, you can't say, sorry we've got 40 people.

**INTERVIEWER** : So there is a flexibility?

**FEÈ** : In a way its working very well, because with production, if you've got demands to meet, you can say to Bonnie, where's Thembe? Can't you find her for me. So somewhere out there, there they are.

**INTERVIEWER** : Regarding what we saw yesterday with that chap.....

.....  
You mentioned maybe idealistically that you want to also consider

diversifying.....

**FEÈ** : When you see a bit of talent, you can't turn away. But I said to Phineas that people have got to show some sort of improvement, because some of them are really just not talented. They're really battling and the work after four months just isn't growing. I would rather work with talented people and unfortunately I get rattled, and it is unfair on the whole studio and I get up there and all I can do is shout to re-do it. They don't like it and it wears off on the whole studio. It is so much nicer when appy's come in, everyone has help.

.....  
So I control myself and I say they are learning, be a bit patient. Sell it a bit cheaper. Let them just develop. But after four months, I've lost my patience. Its not a personal thing. I can't stand seeing bad work. I can't stand seeing unexciting work. Its a hunger for creativity.

**INTERVIEWER :** .....

Do they come to you and you say go and do painting or go and do building.

**FEÈ** : It depends. My builders work far quicker and are producing much quicker than my painters. The painting is the difficult part. So at the moment I won't take on anymore builders. I've got my full amount of people.

Again you make allowances. Like this chap whose arrived. He's got potential. So I make allowances for somebody like that whose showing initiative. Not just someone whose come in for a job.

At the moment I will say I am not taking anyone else on.

Now Moses, one of the brother's who works at the Nest Hotel, suddenly a plate arrives. Whose painted this? Moses. Cindy for example will have a couple of plates and Moses will do one and its jolly good. So every time I pay out a wage bill, there's about five more that are added on. They might only be earning R50,00, but you've got this continuous adding on sort of thing. So as such you don't want to start a whole new problem. Sorry, the studio's full up.

**INTERVIEWER :** If someone comes in, you would not at the moment because of present circumstances put them into building because you've got a full quota there. Would you see if they have ability?

**FEÈ** : I would give them a month's trial. Then you normally feel sorry for the person, you see they battling and you let them continue. That's how I end up with forty.

At the moment I've said to some of them, I'm shouting too much at you, its not good for you and I've said to them I'm having to pay you a retainer of R4,00 a day, on top of what you are painting and I don't need that. So what I've said to them, at the end of the month I am going to see who can earn R200,00 a month on their work, not on the

R4,00 a day, which is what is happening. They're cruising on the R4,00 a day.

They're not producing. They're coming late. I don't have the time to watch that they are here at 8.30am and then they don't do the cleaning properly. Because I am paying them R4,00, I feel I must get my money's worth out of them, that they must clean.

The old system worked better where they had to clean where they had to do a weekends duty, that was part of the contract that they were to work in the studio.

**INTERVIEWER :** Previously, how did it work?

**FEÈ :** Previously it was under my terms in a written contract that they were to work from home, come to the studio. They would get paid for each piece that they made. If they didn't come to the studio, they had to do a weekend duty, because I needed help on the weekend. I felt we were selling them and that was a part of the studio. So it ended up they would doing one weekend in three months.

Then I had no-one in the studio. Suddenly I found myself with 6 people in the studio and I couldn't find these people and I was trying to fish work out of the location.

At the beginning of this year as an incentive, I said I am going to pay you R4,00 a day to come to the studio. Suddenly they all started coming to the studio again.

The thing is now I have forty people and I am paying R4,00 a day and my wages are going overboard.

So a month ago I said to Phineas, I actually can't afford this. I am paying R3 000,00 a month for them to just come to the studio. As a privilege to the older women like Bonnie, Punch and Mavis, let them come at 9.00am and let the appy's earn a bit more money, let them do the cleaning.

The makers, the two ladies who are doing the making, can work so much quicker. They were earning sometimes beyond R500,00.

I said the makers are now earning enough. Lets cut out the makers coming in. Lets just keep it to the painters. Because the painters are the ones who battle, and I need painters. But again they are cruising on it. I can see its actually not working.

**INTERVIEWER :** So you're not paying the makers?

**FEÈ :** I'm not paying the makers. I'm paying the painters, R4,00 a day to come in. I don't know quite what the solution is. Now the makers are pitching up 10.00am or 11.00am, so their production is slowing up. Actually, seeing this month, they are not earning as much as they have the last two months, because there's not that discipline of getting here earlier. And what they were doing, they were coming more frequently on the weekends to make up that extra R4,00. Now I am getting the painters coming on the weekend. But I said if you come

on the weekend, I will still pay you R4,00, because I love them being there on the weekend.

**INTERVIEWER :** So the contract deal is now either a wage thing now? What else do you do, you train them.

**FEÈ :** I train them, pay the electricity, provide the paints etc. They also get 5% of sales. I had to try this incentive. Because if I was not there, no-one would down tools. They don't like to do something that is not part of their portfolio.

**INTERVIEWER :** Is there differentiated percentage?

**FEÈ :** Bonnie is on a 50/50. Phineas is on a 50/50. Then Mavis and Hutch, they are on a 30/20, but then again if they produce something slack, they don't get 30% on everything.

**INTERVIEWER :** Is there no friction?

**FEÈ :** They work on that whole status. Bonnie and Phineas.

**INTERVIEWER :** How do they get on ?

**FEÈ :** More loyalty. Punch and Mavis have been there since 1989 and they've continued to progress. They've reached that level. Also I work on a collection. If their work is in a public collection, I put the percentage up. And then again if people came here with a card, there's another 5% off.

**INTERVIEWER :** The contract, do you they sign it?

**FEÈ :** Yes they sign it and I sign it.  
We spoke to the guy who drew up the contracts for James's labourers and he said all you do is that they sign an agreement that they've accepted your terms. If they are not prepared to accept my terms, like those chaps who started here who said I owed them R100,00 for the piece and I said you don't fit with the way we work, its also protection Bonnie. Because Bonnie started right from the bottom. Why should a newcomer suddenly get a different wage.  
Bonnie's been here since 1985. I can't suddenly change the rules. There's too many people who want to work with me.

**INTERVIEWER :** You are actually trained to be a tertiary educationalist. You at that level. In reality you could be teaching at a University. So they getting exceptionally good teaching.

**FEÈ :** So that's been good. Its good for them to see that whites actually want to learn and both Bronwen and Maria, I sit next to them and work as one of them.

I should get far more advice on all these things, but there's just no time. I am doing it just by trial and error.

**INTERVIEWER :** Is your incentive motivated by ideological concerns?

**FEÈ :** I think totally and utterly I hunger to see beautiful things. I have so many ideas in my head and two hands and my time limit cannot produce that. Its been so wonderful to feed if off onto other people and let me take ideas, but beyond that magic. An idea that has been totally changed.

Having an idea and arriving at a solution which is so wonderful and beyond your original concept and yet at other times they can follow your concept and produce, and its a totally a visual thing, if you can't relate to..... I just love seeing those things and there's an energy thing. I think when I see that guy and his potential with those frame things, its just hunger to see what's going to come and the excitement of it. Its an adrenaline.

I don't think I was particularly aware of really trying to help people. I don't think that was my prime motive. That's a subconscious thing

.....  
Marion Arnold saw that this whole sort of thing because I was female, the care, the extension of not wanting to take the power for myself, the nurturing. Now my brother-in-law works in a very similar way to what I do but it is Patrick Mavros.

Now that work is signed, PM, every piece. He doesn't touch one thing. Now look at Boetie. Miriam and Agnes have worked on his things and he doesn't recognise them. I feel it is a mother thing. Its Boetie's work, it is his idea. They were my ideas. I'm not jealous. For me it is pride. I know I can make art. That's my creativity. The whole thing. That's my achievement. Not an individual work that hangs in the National Gallery. I think my father always had that humbleness of pride. He said you don't take ..... He said you don't have to be boosted all the time.

I don't think I will be remembered for individual art works, but more for the energy thing, the creativity of that. Boetie used to hammer me, very much the male thing.....

.....  
That's the way she's viewed. She felt that because I was a female and not having this ego thing of a man, was quite an interesting concept. I never sort of viewed it that way. Boetie turned around and said, feminine - you're nothing but a Hitler. You are power hungry. They are creating an art that I want to see.

I remember the name they call me. They are afraid of me. They know that I am after the ultimate piece. That is what I am relating to, that little bowl, that egg cup, whatever. They've got to perform.

I think that energy thing is what brings out that push beyond, otherwise its that repetitious, that complacency. You wouldn't get beyond that.

**INTERVIEWER :** That is why you are feeding them images which are stimulating and interesting to you, and you say take them, translate, lets see what comes Then your next step would be to look at the result and then feedback, positive or negative.  
So that's your impact. Its totally visual.

**FEÈ :** You don't have that academic communication. You can't talk to them.  
.....  
.....

**INTERVIEWER :** You say you can't communicate with them intellectually, academically to convey ideas, so its visual. What other ways do you communicate?

**FEÈ :** We also talk after unpacking the kilns and discuss the work. They help with the pricing. Judging, choosing, what is better and what is bad. It just teaching them to see a better shape, a better form.  
Just teaching them to see the difference between a bad form and a good form.  
Art is not really about a good form or bad form, its whether its taken on a character. You get a character that looks like a frog and I will say that. Its got a personality. But you can't use the word personality and you learn little words that help like, katela, which is tired. It comes from the complacency and repetition, making the same shapes, painting zebras over and over. Lets try something new.  
As I relate to them with my tiredness, I energise again. Because I am tired of seeing that giraffe.

**INTERVIEWER :** You running a business here and you selling stuff and its going to Johannesburg and wherever. You may be tired of giraffes down here but you might have a huge demand there. Does influence get in your way?

**FEÈ :** No, because I reckon by the time the public are tired of the giraffes....  
..... For me, that is why I relate to Mr Amos who arrives with things that aren't giraffes. Its why I relate to Wonderboy. That's the stimulation.  
Nlhanlha has gone into slab building. That's a whole new thing. He's experimenting. So the creative aspect only comes through encouragement and praise and payment. It might not be a piece just on percentage, but they've suddenly come up with something that I've responded to. Its something new and I pay them that extra bit, because they've been innovated and they not producing the same old bowl.

**INTERVIEWER :** Do you pay them before the work is sold?

**FEÈ :** Yes.



Which puts me on my toes to market the stuff. I've then got to sell it.

**INTERVIEWER :** They wouldn't get those advantages anywhere else.

**FEÈ :** No. As an artist, you've got to put it on exhibition, produce it, buy your paints first and then wait.

**INTERVIEWER :** When you assess the pricing, do you .....

**FEÈ :** Yes.  
If I am away, Phineas will tell them. That's worth about R70,00.

**INTERVIEWER :** Do you accept his price.

**FEÈ :** Yes, he's quite mean actually.

**APPENDIX 4**

**INFORMATION ABOUT THE ARDMORE STUDIO**

**WRITTEN BY JOAN DORFMAN**

**IN 1997**

# Ardmore

*Ceramic Art*

*Ardmore*, began in 1985 as the studio of artist, lecturer Fee Halsted-Berning, and now represents over 45 Zulu and Sotho artists, most are women.

Made by hand, Ardmore ceramic art reflects the personal style of the artists who create it. Sixteen of these artists are represented in galleries throughout South Africa. Fee Halsted-Berning and Bonnie Ntshalintshali are recognized internationally.

*Nestled in the Drakensberg Mountains of KwaZulu Natal both the Ardmore Ceramic Art Studio in Winterton and the Springvale Gallery in Rosetta welcome visitors.*

## **Ardmore Ceramic Art Studio**

Telephone: (036) 468-1242

Champaigne Valley (D275) KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

## **Springvale Gallery**

Telephone: (0333) 37031 Fax: (0333) 37145

P.O. Box 1007, Mooi River 3300, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

*Ardmore*, began in 1985 as the studio of artist, lecturer Fee Halsted Berning, and now represents over 45 Zulu and Sotho artists, most are women.

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# Ardmore

*Ceramic Art*

P.O. Box 1007, Mooi River 3300, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa  
Telephone: (0333) 37031 Fax: (0333) 37145

Ardmore began in 1985 as the studio of artist, lecturer Fee Halsted-Berning. Born in Zimbabwe, Halsted-Berning completed her Fine Art degree at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg in 1983. She lectured Ceramics at the Durban Technikon in 1984 and moved the following year to *Ardmore* Farm in the Central Drakensberg Mountains of KwaZulu Natal.

Here, while continuing with her own evocative ceramic sculpture, Halsted-Berning began training and teaching local artists. In 1990, she and her first pupil, Bonnie Natshalintshali, received the Standard Bank Young Artist Award. Today, their work is part of every major South African collection, and continues to bring them recognition as two of the country's leading artists.

*Ardmore Ceramic Art*, now represents over 45 Zulu and Sotho artists, most are women. Directed by Halsted-Berning, Ardmore creates job opportunities for these artists by providing materials, tuition and markets for their work. The artists often work in collaboration. Painters and builders, encouraged to try new disciplines, yet allowed to pursue their natural passions, inspire each other while working together in the design and finishing of many pieces. Ardmore ceramic art work is unique, made by hand, and reflects the personal style of the artists who create it.

In 1996, Springvale Gallery was opened on the Berning family farm in the Natal Midlands. This gallery exhibits Fee Halsted-Berning's personal selection of Ardmore ceramic art pieces as well as original prints and drawings by its artists. Both the Ardmore Ceramic Art Studio in the Champagne Valley of KwaZulu Natal, and the Springvale Gallery in Rosetta welcome visitors.

Ardmore's brilliantly coloured domestic ware and distinctive sculptural objects are inspired by the natural world. Ardmore Ceramic Art has created work for the Henri Bendel collection in New York as well as a line of domestic ware for the Phinda Game Reserve in KwaZulu Natal. Ardmore artists have won many awards. Sixteen of these artists are represented in galleries throughout South Africa. Fee Halsted-Berning and Bonnie Natshalintshali are recognized internationally.

## **APPENDIX 5**

### **MONTHLY RUNNING COSTS OF THE STUDIO**

Pay role	R30 000
Clay	R1 000
Underglaze	R4 000
Brushes	R400
Glaze	R200
Telephone	R2 000
Petrol	R1 000
Freight	R3 000
Packaging- packets, tissue paper, newspaper, boxes, bubble wrap	R1 000
Stationary	R300
Press and Exhibition Publications and Printing and photographs	R2 000
UIF	R300
Extras- weed-eater, electrician, new elements etc	R500
	<b>TOTAL R45 700</b>

**Extra Expenses for 1996:**

Brochures	9 000
Building Maintenance	25 000
Kiln Repairs and new equipment	20 000
	<b>TOTAL 54 000</b>

## **APPENDIX 6**

### **PRICE LISTS**

**FOR MARCH 1997**

**WRITTEN BY JOAN DORFMANN AND FEE HALSTED**

**BERNING**

**FOR ORDERS FROM CUSTOMERS,**

**BOTH SOUTH AFRICAN AND ABROAD**

*The price list only lists prices for the studio ware, not for Ghesa's and Ntshalintshali's sculptures. Prices for sculptures made by Bonnie Ntshalintshali range from R6 000-R15 000 while prices for Josephine Ghesa's sculptures range from R4 000-R10 000 (Interview conducted with Halsted Berning March 1997).*

Price list:  
including VAT

# Ardmore

*Ceramic Art*

P.O. Box 1007, Mooi River 3300, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa Telephone: (0333) 37031 Fax: (0333) 37145

## PLATES

Small	R90 - R160
Dinner	R180 - R300
Platter	R280 - R500
Embossed platter	R280 - R680
Cheese plate, large	R250 - R600
Oval dish	R400 - R700
Large meat plate	R700 - R2800

## JUGS & VASES

Small	R100 - R250
Medium	R200 - R480
Large	R500 - R5000

## TEAPOTS

Small	R300 - R450
Medium	R480 - R800
Large	R700 - R5000

## MUGS

with Legs	R90 - R180
Cup & saucer	R120 - R200
Large mugs on legs	R150 - R280

## BUTTER DISHES

Animal heads	R270 - R350
Duck & Guinea fowl	R280 - R350
Round with animal	R500 - R1800

MUSTARD POTS R70 - R100

JAM POTS with LID R120 - R280

SUGAR BOWLS R280 - R400

SERVING BOWLS R200 - R680

VERY LARGE BOWLS R480 - R3000



TUREENS	R600 - R3000
ELONGATED TRAYS	R380 - R700
EGG CUPS	R50 - R70
SALT & PEPPER	R80 - R280
CANDLE STICKS	R150 - R280
WALL SCONCE	R200 - R380
SOAP DISHES	R180 - R280
ORNAMENTS	
Guinea fowl	R20 - R35
Animal	R20 - R60
SWEETIE DISH or Compote	R400 - R800
RACKS	R180 - R380
ASH TRAYS	R80 - R200

### *INNOVATIVE CERAMIC WARE*

Each Ardmore ceramic art piece is made by hand, so no two items are the same. Our artists create distinctive sculptural and brilliantly coloured art objects that also serve as functional domestic ware.

Ardmore pieces vary in price according to design, detail and uniqueness.

All our glazed ware is microwave and dishwasher safe, *however*, limited use in these appliances is recommended.

### *SHIPPING*

All shipping, handling and postage will be paid by the retailer.  
Delivery fees may also apply.  
We cannot be held responsible for breakage.

We accept VISA and Mastercard.

Thank you,